

WILD WEST

WEEKLY

A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

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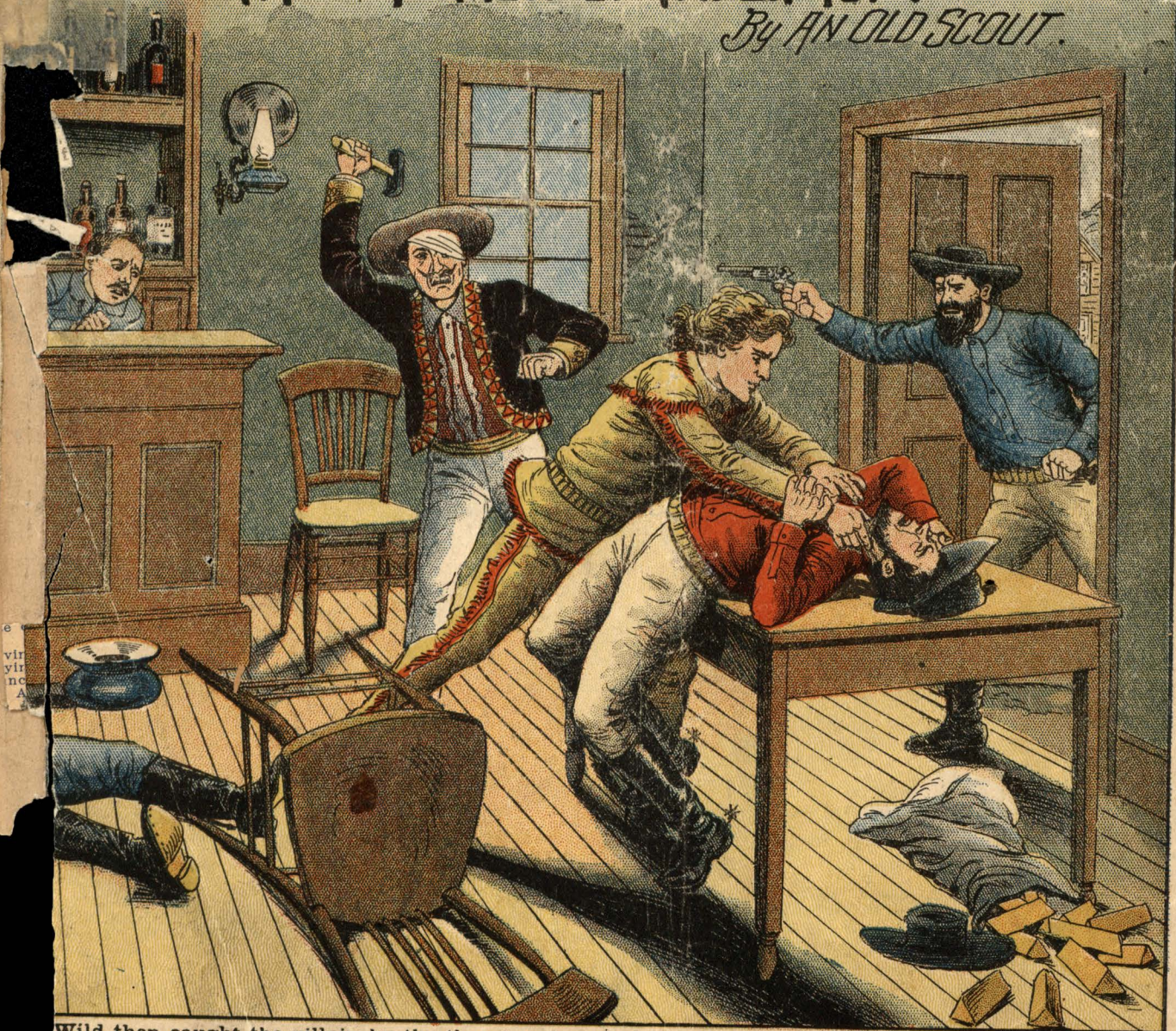
No. 26.

NEW YORK, APRIL 17, 1903.

Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG WILD WEST IN DEADWOOD; OR, THE TERROR OF TAPER TOP.

By AN OLD SCOUT.



Wild then caught the villain by the throat and pushed him back on the table. The Mexican seized a hammer and rushed up behind the boy. Just then Cheyenne Charlie, revolver in hand, opened the door.

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Young Wild West in Deadwood;

OR,

THE TERROR OF TAPER TOP.

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CHAPTER I.

A THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD.

It was a hazy afternoon in August, 1877.

The long canyon that led through the middle range of the Black Hills was certainly anything but a pleasant place to ride in on such a hot and close day, when not a breath of air was stirring.

Yet a party of five horsemen might have been seen riding slowly along and taking things comparatively easy.

But this particular five were well used to all sorts of weather.

The party consisted of Young Wild West, well known as the Prince of the Saddle and champion rifle shot of the West, his three partners, Jim Dart, Jack Robedee the famous scout, Cheyenne Charlie, and Lively Rick from Devil Creek, a warm friend of the partners.

The riders looked very neat in their suits of buckskin, corduroy, brightly colored flannels and silks.

Neither of them wore a coat, as it was altogether too warm for such an article.

Young Wild West made the most imposing picture of the lot.

Mounted on the splendid sorrel that had carried him safely through so many tight places during his encounters with Indians and villainous white men, and wearing a blue silk shirt that was loosened at the throat, buckskin knee breeches trimmed with red fringe, and slate colored som-

brero that was turned up on one side, with his long chestnut hair falling over his shoulders, he was certainly bound to please the eye of any admirer of neatness and good looks.

About his waist was the usual belt worn by the men of that region in those times, with its holsters for revolvers and the hunting knife stuck in it, and over his shoulder was slung a repeating rifle of the latest pattern of the times.

His companions were similarly attired, with the exception that they were more partial to red and brown, and their shirts were of those colors.

Our friends were on their way from the hustling town of Weston to what was then known as the bad and wicked town of Deadwood.

Young Wild West had a business deal on hand with a man in Deadwood, which if it could be brought about the way he wanted it, would put a few thousand dollars in his pocket.

He had simply spoken of taking a ride over to the chief town of the Hills, as it was called, and his partners and Lively Rick wanted to come right away.

Rick had been a very successful miner at Devil Creek, and nothing suited him better than to go out on a trip with Young Wild West.

There was always plenty of fun and excitement on the trips they made, and that was just what the man from Devil Creek enjoyed.

The four partners of Weston had such able and trusted men in their employ that they could go and come at leisure, and their interests in the Wild West Mining and Improve-

ment Company, a well-paying institution, were looked after by the president of the concern, old Dove-Eye Dave, the pioneer resident of Weston.

"This here canyon are what I call a putty long slit in ther mountain to ride through," observed Lively Rick, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow with a big bandana handkerchief. "I reckon we oughter reach ther end of it putty soon."

"It is about three miles longer, I should judge," replied Young Wild West. "Then we have seven miles of a pretty good road to get into Deadwood; we will take it a little easy till we reach the good road; then we can hurry the horses a little."

"What did you say ther feller's name is that wanted to see you so bad?" asked Jack Robedee.

"Mel Martin, I believe is the name he goes by. I have never met him, but my informant says he is a rather peculiar sort of a man; makes his money by gambling and all sorts of crooked deals."

"And yet you are going to do business with him?" said Rick.

"Of course," spoke up Jim Dart. "You don't suppose he could get the best of Wild, do you?"

"Well, I reckon not. Wild, what is ther business you are going to do with ther feller, anyway, if I may ask ther question?"

"Well, I don't mind telling you. You know that strip of land that runs alongside the stream that takes underground a mile or two from our quadruple claim in Weston?"

"Yes."

"Well, I understand that this man, Mel Martin, has bought it from the three miners who gave it up and left our town for Deadwood. I would have bought the piece had I known they wanted to sell it so cheap. One of the stagecoach drivers heard me say so, and he told Mel Martin, who at once sent word for me to come over and see him, as he did not intend to work the property, and that we might be able to fix up a good deal. That is why I wanted to come to Deadwood principally."

"An' you wanted to see ther town, generally," remarked Cheyenne Charlie, stroking his black beard and smiling just as though he was sure he knew what he was talking about.

"That's right, Charlie!" exclaimed Wild. "You hit the nail right on the head. The truth of the matter is that I felt as though I would like to stay in Deadwood a couple of days, or perhaps a week. It is a very tough place, they say, and I want to see if they would allow the privilege of the town, so long as I behaved myself and paid strict attention to my own business."

"I see," remarked Rick. "You want a little more excitement than kin be found in Weston about now. You want to tame things over there a little."

"No; I don't propose to try and tame anybody, unless they go to piling it on me. That is not my idea of going to Deadwood at all. I want to buy that strip of land of Mel

Martin, if I can, and then I want to see why Deadwood is called such a bad town. That about covers it, I guess."

This seemed to satisfy all hands, so Cheyenne Charlie changed the subject by remarking that it must be close to the mouth of the canyon where the stagecoach line from Baldtown to Deadwood ran through.

"I guess you are right," Young Wild West answered.

"I hearn tell that there's lots of hold-ups on that route," the scout went on to say.

"I suppose so. There is considerable travel over the line, and that gives the road agents a chance to get in their work occasionally."

It was about four in the afternoon when they reached the end of the canyon.

They were riding out on to the broad, level tract that the stagecoach line ran over when a big placard suddenly caught Wild's eye.

It was tacked to the trunk of a big tree and looked as though it had recently been placed there.

"Hello!" he cried, "I guess we will see what that reads."

On the placard was the following:

\$1,000 REWARD!

The above reward will be paid for Tim Talbot, dead or alive! Description: medium sized man with heavy blonde mustache and goatee; usually wears a jaunty velvet riding suit. The man who calls himself the Terror of Taper Top is the fellow we want.

"JOHN BARCLAY,

"Sheriff Pennington Co."

"That looks business-like, I must say," observed Jim Dart. "It might be that we might have a chance to earn that reward; eh, Wild?"

"Well, such a thing could happen," was the retort. "Taper Top, it says. I wonder where that is?"

"That little peak over there looks as though it might be Taper Top," spoke up Lively Rick, pointing off to the left about two miles from where they had halted.

"Jove! I guess you are right!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie. "That tapers up to a point as nice as though it were made by hand. An' as it is a very wild-lookin' place around it, I wouldn't be surprised if that was where Tim Talbot, the Terror of Taper Top, hangs out. But I s'pose we'll learn all about it after we git to Deadwood."

"Taper Top, hey?" remarked Robedee. "I never heard of such a place afore. Well, I, for one, am goin' to be on ther lookout for this Tim Talbot. He must be a regular terror, or a reward wouldn't be offered for him, dead or alive."

"It won't be long before some one will claim the reward," said Young Wild West, as he led the way from the tree. "That placard has not been up very long, by the looks of it. There will be lots of fellows trying to earn that thousand dollars, I have no doubt."

The five had not ridden over two hundred yards from the tree when they suddenly heard a shrill blast from a whistle.

The sound came from behind them, and they immediately turned and looked for the person who had made it.

"Whoa, Spitfire!" cried Young Wild West, as he saw a dapper-looking horseman, who was attired in a fancy riding suit of velvet looking at the placard.

"Great Scott, boys!" he added; "if that isn't Tim Talbot, the man who is wanted by the sheriff, I am much mistaken!"

"As sure as you live, it is!" exclaimed Jack. "See! he's got a big blonde mustache and a goatee!"

This was indeed the truth.

Our friends were just about to turn their steeds as if by mutual consent when a number of mounted men appeared around a bend and rode up to the tree where the rider sat so jauntily on his steed.

At that moment a burst of laughter came from the horsemen, and then turning to his companions, Wild said:

"Come, boys, we will go back and see what they are so hilarious over."

On a quick trot Wild West rode back to the tree, the others following him closely.

"Gentlemen," said he, as the men sat in the saddle gazing at them, some of them still laughing and others with an insolent stare; "gentlemen, is that the way to Deadwood?"

"Yes," was the quick answer from the fancy dressed fellow. "Is that where you are bound?"

"That is where we are bound," replied our hero.

"Well, I am glad you came back and asked us the way. Probably you don't know the rules."

"Rules?"

"Yes; I guess you haven't been to Deadwood lately."

"Well, none of us have; that is a fact."

Wild was watching every move of the fellow, and he was ready for anything just then.

"I thought so," and the man broke into a smile, showing a set of even teeth and bringing out the lines of his really handsome face to good advantage. "Well, gents, I'll tell you the rules, then. Every stranger who passes this way to Deadwood has to pay a toll. You will, therefore, hand over what money and valuables you have about you! I never——"

That was as far as he got.

He had drawn his revolver as quick as a flash, evidently with the intent of covering the boy, but before he could get it to a level, he found himself looking straight into the muzzle of Wild's shooter.

And that was not all, either.

The other four also had their revolvers leveled at him, just as though they had ridden back for the very purpose of making him their prisoner.

"I guess we won't pay any toll to-day, Mr. Terror of Taper Top," Young Wild West remarked, in his easy-going style. "If you or one of your men so much as make a move to shoot you will fall from that horse a corpse!"

"Who in thunder are you, anyway?" the man managed to blurt out.

"I am Young Wild West. I take it that you are Tim Talbot; am I right?"

"Yes; you are right," was the rather defiant answer, as he looked around to see what his men were doing.

But they were all sitting very quietly on their horses.

Not one of them had ventured to even put his hand on his revolver, either.

They sat there, the picture of astonishment.

"Seeing that you were going to take toll from us, Tim Talbot," resumed our hero, calmly, "I guess we will take you to Deadwood with us and divide that thousand dollars among us. Your men can go on about their business, but you will go with us!"

"I—I——" and the surprised villain's face turned red from rage and astonishment.

"Now don't go to getting excited," interrupted Wild. "You would rather have us take you alive than dead, I presume. Just tell your men to ride on, and impress it on their minds that if they go to playing any tricks on us that you will die! I mean what I say, sir!"

There was an awful lot of meaning in those few words of the dashing young Prince of the Saddle, and for the first time in all his vicious career as a gentleman of the road Tim Talbot felt that he had met more than his match.

Mechanically he opened his lips.

"Boys, ride on. I'll meet you later."

That was all he said, but after a slight hesitation on the part of some of them, the men obeyed.

There were just ten of them, and they felt rather humiliated at being compelled to give in to just half their number.

But they rode off and did not look behind them till they had disappeared behind the bend they had showed up from.

"Now, then, we will proceed to Deadwood."

As Wild said this he moved his horse a little closer and took charge of Tim Talbot's two revolvers and the knife that protruded from the leather case fastened to his belt.

At this Robedee seized the bridle of the horse, which was a handsome black, and then with Charlie and Jim keeping a watch in the direction of where the band of ten had last been seen, they started on a gallop from the spot, Lively Rick fetching the outlaw's horse a smart crack on the rump to start him off.

It had all happened so suddenly that even Wild was surprised at what they had done.

But he knew it was going to be a difficult task to get the prisoner to Deadwood.

Those ten men were not apt to be of the sort who would remain idle while their leader was being taken off to the sheriff by such a small party as that.

And they were not going to allow it, either, for our friends had not gone more than twenty yards with their prisoner before there was a loud whoop, and then the outlaws appeared riding toward them with the speed of the wind.

Of course this diverted the attention of the five from the prisoner for an instant, and Tim Talbot took advantage of

it, showing that he was watchful and cool, even if he had allowed a boy to get the drop on him.

He jabbed the rowels deep into his horse's flanks and let out a yell of defiance that echoed from the surrounding hills.

The black steed leaped forward, almost dragging Jack Robedee from the saddle and making him let go his grasp on the bridle rein.

Like a shot the animal wheeled around and leaped toward the party of men coming to their leader's rescue.

Lively Rick raised his revolver to fire at him, but in a ringing voice Young Wild West cried out:

"Don't! If we can't take the Terror of Taper Top alive, we won't take him at all!"

CHAPTER II.

TIM TALBOT AND HIS OUTLAW BAND.

It was a remarkably swift horse that Tim Talbot rode, and when he heard Young Wild West call out to his companions not to shoot, he felt that he was safe.

Our five friends did not offer to pursue him.

Wild knew it would be useless to think of recapturing him now, for it was quite likely that the outlaws would fight to the death to save him.

And that meant that there would be more than one to bite the dust.

As soon as the handsome captain of the rascally band reached the men, who had spread out in a sort of semi-circle across the road, he cried out in a ringing tone:

"About face! Young Wild West would not allow me to be shot at, so I will not allow him to be pursued!" Then, turning in the saddle, he added:

"We are even up, my dashing boy with the long hair. For the present we will call it quits; but when we meet again, look out!"

"You are the one who wants to look out," came the laughing retort from Young Wild West. "If you call this a game of quits, you can do so; but if I wanted that thousand dollars reward very bad, you can bet I would have had it as soon as we get to the sheriff's office in Deadwood."

The Terror of Taper Top made no reply.

With the band of ten following him closely, he galloped on up the road, past the tree that contained the placard, and on toward the tapering little peak that reared itself from a regular jungle.

He did not say a word until a mile had been covered.

Then turning to the man who was evidently his lieutenant, he observed:

"They haven't been fools enough to follow us, have they? Len?"

"No, cap. I guess they kept right on for Deadwood," was the reply. "Did you ever see anything as quick as that fellow who said he was Young Wild West?"

"I must admit that he beats anything I ever met," acknowledged the captain.

"He had his revolver on you afore any of us knew it; an' yet, when you was talkin' to him he did not have his hand

near his belt. I rather opine that he is a feller that we want to be careful of! An' he's only a boy, too."

This remark seemed to express the opinions of the majority of the men.

But there were two or three of them who would not allow themselves to believe that the boy was anything more than an upstart, and that it was all by luck that he had got his revolver leveled before Captain Tim had been able to cover him.

One of these was a Mexican named Valdez, and it is safe to say that he was the worst man in the gang.

As treacherous as a snake and as heartless as a hyena, this man was a dangerous fellow.

He was powerful, too, and his wickedness knew no end.

But there was thing about him that kept him down to his level.

He was a coward.

He would not stand and fight against odds, like his handsome captain would.

No! Valdez liked to fight, but he always wanted to have advantage before he did much of it.

Then he would show just how savage and heartless he could be.

But he was a valuable adjunct to the band of outlaws, for when any sneaking work was needed to be done the Mexican was just the man to do it.

That made him quite a favorite with Tim Talbot.

"Me fix da Young Wild West," he said to the captain, as they rode along. "Me stick da knife in his back!"

"I guess you can do that if any one can, Valdez," was the reply. "But I want to meet him once more just to see if it was really luck that he had to-day. If I fail, then you can fix him, because I will feel quite sure that Young Wild West is a dangerous young fellow."

"All right, Capda Tim," and the swarthy scoundrel seemed to be satisfied.

About a mile and a half from the tree containing the placard the eleven outlaws swerved from the road and took to a dry watercourse.

The bed of this ran over a solid rock for perhaps two or three hundred feet, and there was nothing on it but gravel and small stones.

That made it so the villains could leave the road and not leave a trail behind them.

In the wet season, when there was water in the brook, they took to the water and followed its course till they reached the path in the dense thicket that took them to their headquarters at Taper Top, as the little cone of earth and rock was called.

The thicket was one of thorns and briars, and the path through it had been cut by Tim Talbot and his men when they chose the place for a headquarters a few months before the opening of our story.

They worked four solid nights to make the path, and after they got it to the foot of the little peak they felt that they were more than paid for their trouble, for they found a cave right in the base of the tapering mass of rock

and earth that only needed a few days' work to make it all they could wish for as a rendezvous.

The band of eleven outlaws rode in single file over the zigzag path through the mazes of the thicket until they were within a few yards of the base of the cone.

Then a deep gully loomed up before them.

But the Terror of Taper Top simply turned his horse sharply to the right, and then down he went over an incline of about forty degrees to the bottom of the gully.

The horses did not seem to be the least disturbed in making this quick descent. On the contrary, they appeared to be glad to get there, which was easily explained, since they had not been fed since the early morning.

Once in the gully-like place the animals were relieved of their trappings and turned loose to go where they liked.

But they were limited to a certain scope, since a hundred yards to the right the gully narrowed into a fissure that was not wide enough for a man to squeeze through, let alone a horse.

And to the left, right near the spot where they had come down in the gully several large trees had been felled across it and cut into suitable lengths to make a regular barricade.

Directly beneath the mass of rock that tapered upward was a slanting wall of rock which really formed part of its base, and in this was an irregular shaped opening which led into a cave of good dimensions.

This was the headquarters of Tim Talbot and his band.

A man appeared at the entrance of the cave as the horsemen rode down into the gully, and he at once saluted them in a semi-military style.

When the villains went away a man was always left to watch the place.

And this one man had it in his power to blow a hundred men into the air, for under the path ten feet from the edge of the steep bank of the gully a mine of powder was laid with a fuse leading into the cave.

This had been arranged by the Terror so that it could be set off in case they were ever pursued to the place by their enemies.

They could rid themselves of a number of men in short order, and then the survivors could be easily slain or put to flight.

"Now, for dinner!" cried Captain Tim. "The ride from Baldtown has made me hungry; and that is no wonder, since I have tasted nothing since breakfast. Hurry up, you fellows who are going to do the cooking! You know what we have got ahead of us to-night."

"That's right, cap," answered one of the men, as he ran to the little brook a few feet distant and proceeded to wash his face and hands. "We are all hungry, I guess, an' we'll soon fill in on bear meat, venison an' coffee, along with some hot corn cakes. It won't take more'n half an hour, either."

Two more of the men followed his example by going to the brook.

The three made up the cooks of the gang, and they

certainly understood their business sufficiently to suit their leader, who was rather particular about his grub, especially as to the clean part of the business.

It was cool and refreshing in the cave.

There was a rift in the rear end at the top, and this made a circulation of air through it.

Tim Talbot threw himself upon a pile of skins, and accepting the cigarette Valdez, the Mexican, rolled and offered him, he lighted it and smoked while he awaited the meal that was being prepared.

In a sort of natural fireplace a fire had been started, and in a few minutes the odor of the coffee and the sizzling meat filled the air.

It was scarcely more than half an hour when the chief cook announced that the captain's dinner was ready.

He got up and seated himself at the rough table near the entrance to the retreat and proceeded to make a hearty meal.

The others sat down as fast as the victuals were cooked and placed on the table.

Enough for the whole lot could not be cooked at one time.

After the meal had been washed down by a copious draught of red wine from a cask that was stored in a secluded corner of the cave, Tim Talbot took another cigarette from the Mexican, and then threw himself on the pile of skins again to take it easy for awhile.

But somehow he could not keep the thoughts of Young Wild West out of his mind.

He had never met such a quick and easy-going fellow in his life, and he was forced to think that he had been badly beaten at his own game when he demanded toll of the party of five.

"I wonder who he is, and where he hails from?" he asked himself. "They were a fine-looking lot of men with him, too, and they all looked as though they could handle themselves if it became necessary. Well, after we make this haul to-night I will arrange to go over to Deadwood and see if I can't meet this Young Wild West, if he is still there. And if he has taken leave of the town, so much the better for him, and—so much the better for me."

The latter thought came into the man's mind unbidden, and uttering an oath, which he quickly changed into a laugh, he got up.

One of the men was telling the guard of their meeting with the five fancy dressed horsemen, and when Captain Tim heard the guard remark that he knew Young Wild West he pricked up his ears.

"You know him?" queried the fellow who was telling the story.

"Yes; I seen him lots of times over in Weston," was the reply.

Talbot now stepped up.

"Did I hear you say that you were acquainted with Young Wild West?" he asked.

"Yes, cap," was the reply. "That is, I ain't so much acquainted with him as to be a friend, or anything like that; but I've seen him lots of times. He is one of ther quickest

shots that ever lived, I've heard, an' I've seen him do a little of it myself."

"You said he belongs in Weston, didn't you?"

"Yes; ther town was named after him, they say. He is ther boss of ther town, too, an' it is run about ther way him an' his friends wants it to be. Ther old man who acts as a sort of mayor does jest what Young Wild West says every time, and if there is any crooked game goin' on it will be all up with ther ones what's runnin' it in no time."

"Then perhaps it was not so much luck that he got the best of me this afternoon, after all," mused the Terror of Taper Top, half aloud.

"I reckon if he got ther best of you, cap, it wasn't luck; it is his way," said the guard.

"Well, I will meet him again, and then we will see whether it was luck or not," and with that the leader of the band of villains sought the pile of skins once more and was soon taking a nap.

It was about dusk when Talbot was awakened by his lieutenant.

"Come, cap; it is time we was thinkin' about goin' out on the business trip, you know. Ther stagecoach is due at ther corner at eight, an' we ain't got so very much time to git there."

"That's so, by Jove! What made me sleep so long, I wonder? I was dreaming of that fellow, Young Wild West, too. I just had him where I wanted him when you aroused me."

"Well, I hope you do git him where you want him putty soon," was the rejoinder. "But let's hurry a little. I'm anxious to see ther fun. Jest think of it! A millionaire an' a young married couple are among our victims to-night!"

"That's right. But I guess the millionaire will be the one we will look after particularly. It isn't likely the young married couple will have much coin with them. I understand the groom is a young fellow who belongs in Deadwood. He went to St. Louis after his bride, and unless he had a big pile when he went, he won't have much now."

"I guess you've got that right. But it'll be fun, jest ther same, to hear the frightened bride scream when we hold 'em up."

"It be a good fun to shoot the husband. Me do it!" remarked Valdez, the Mexican.

"Valdez is always looking for blood," laughed Talbot. "Some of these days some one will draw his blood, and then he will get his punishment."

"Captain Tim he a no look for blood?" remarked the Mexican, questioningly.

"No; I look for gold. But if it is necessary to get the gold by drawing blood, I don't object to doing it."

There was no more said on the subject just then.

The men were too anxious to mount and get away to do much talking.

The man who was to remain on guard brought the captain's handsome black to him, and after buckling the girths to his full satisfaction, Tim Talbot vaulted into the saddle.

Then he gave the word and rode up the short ascent to the path through the thicket.

It lacked but a few minutes to eight when the party of outlaws reached the tree that had the placard nailed to it.

They promptly diverged from the road and drew up behind a fringe of trees that skirted the road on the side opposite to the staring offer of a thousand dollars reward.

As dark as it was, the Terror of Taper Top could see the white cardboard that the words putting a price upon his life were printed on, and it nettled him.

At first he was going to ride over and tear it from the tree.

But he was struck by a second thought, and feeling in his pockets, he found a note-book.

He tore a leaf from this, and then quickly wrote on it with a pencil:

"Compliments of Tim Talbot. When you catch him, be sure you have got the right man.

"THE TERROR OF TAPER TOP."

The reckless outlaw captain could not see to do this very well, but he was an excellent penman, and he knew he could write in the darkness well enough to be understood.

"I want to pin a paper to the notice of reward they have got on that tree," he said to one of the men. "I will ride out and pin it to the placard, and then I guess I will stay right there under the tree till the stagecoach comes along. When I halt it you fellows dash out and attend to your business. You had better move ahead a trifle, so you can head them off, in case the driver attempts to push ahead."

"All right, cap," replied Len, the lieutenant. "We'll do what you say, because we know you always knows what you're talkin' about."

The Terror, as he took such great pride in calling himself, rode over to the tree, putting on his jauntiest air as he did so.

It made no difference whether any one saw him or not; that was his way, and he could not help it.

He had just finished pinning the paper to the placard when the rumbling of wheels was heard in the distance.

The stagecoach was coming.

CHAPTER III.

THE MEETING WITH MEL MARTIN.

Young Wild West and his four friends rode right on for Deadwood.

Their meeting with the Terror of Taper Top had been sufficient to liven them up a little on their journey over from Weston.

In spite of the fact that the notorious man with a price on his head had escaped from them, Wild felt satisfied at the way he had beaten him at his own game.

"I don't know as I care to make myself notorious in

Deadwood on my arrival there," he said to his companions. "If we had held onto our prisoner and got him there we would have created more excitement than a little; and we would have made enemies of all the bad men in town."

"I thought perhaps you meant to let the fellow go, anyhow," spoke up Jim Dart.

"No; I didn't intend to let him go, but I did have an idea that we would not be able to hold him very long. It was a desperate lot he had behind him; what did happen was something like what I expected would. I didn't think, however, that Jack would let go of the horse the way he did."

"I didn't, either," replied Robedee, not the least bit abashed by the remark. "It happened so quick that I didn't have time to think. I reckon if I had held onto the horse I would have been yanked out of ther saddle."

"And then the villains might have opened fire on us. If they had I guess we could have held our own with them, though some of us might have got hurt."

"Let ther measly coyote go," observed Lively Rick. "I reckon you learned him a lesson, Wild. 'Tain't likely he'll bother you ag'in."

"Don't figure on anything like that," said Cheyenne Charlie. "In my opinion, ther best thing we could do was to take ther blonde sport into Deadwood with us, dead or alive."

Charlie always believed in making sure work of all the "bad men" he came in contact with.

At an easy pace they continued on their way, and soon the outskirts of the town came in sight.

Men could be seen working on their claims in almost every direction.

Deadwood was a town that sprang up in a few days, and it was now at its height, as far as a big mining camp went.

And it was growing into a city, at the same time.

Being right in the heart of a rich mining and cattle-raising section, it was bound to advance rapidly.

A big smelting works had just been established there and there was a newspaper published in town.

Some good, substantial buildings were being erected, too, and it so happened that Young Wild West had come over just in time to see the big change that was taking place.

But in spite of the change, the people were not growing any better there.

There being plenty of money in Deadwood in those days, it was natural that crooks and thieves of all sorts would drift there.

Our friends had not brought a great amount of money with them, but they had enough to pay their expenses for a few days, for all that.

If Wild made the deal with Mel Martin, he meant to draw on the bank at Weston for the money.

Though he had lost a hundred thousand through a mistake a few days before, he had raked up enough to buy the property, providing that too much was not asked for it, of course.

And if he did not have the ready cash, he had lands and

stocks enough to enable him to get almost as much as a million, if he wanted it.

He had steadily refused to borrow any from his partners, saying that when he made a mistake he was willing to pay for it, and that as long as he did not need the money, he would not borrow it.

When they got upon the main street our friends rode along until they came to a hotel that looked as though it would suit them to stop at.

Then they at once dismounted, and tying their horses, went inside.

"Hello, Young Wild West! You are certainly good for sore eyes!" cried a man, rushing toward our hero with outstretched hand.

It was Easy Edward, a miner who had called himself the King-Pin of the Saddle.

He had been in Weston for several days a few months before, and was a very warm friend of Young Wild West.

"Why, how are you, Easy?" and our hero shook hands with him in a way that showed he was really glad to meet him.

And so he was; for he now had some one to show him about the town.

Easy Edward had been drinking quite freely, but he was none the less delighted to meet the Young Prince of the Saddle and his companions, and he acted as though he was going to shake their arms off before he would let up.

There was quite a crowd in the place at the time, and naturally Wild and his friends were the center of all eyes just then.

About half of those in the barroom had heard of Young Wild West, and that made them more interested than they would have been from the mere fact of his being a stranger in town.

The men in the place were of a very rough element, for the most part, but they seemed to be on very friendly terms with Easy Edward, so our friends thought nothing of their appearance.

"Gents!" cried Easy, taking off his hat and pulling Wild to the center of the room, "I want to introduce you to ther whitest young feller that ever lived. He's jest ther boss horseman of this part of ther country, an' he kin hit a silver three-cent piece at five hundred yards. There might be some good horsemen an' good rifle shots among yer, but you can't hold a candle to Young Wild West! I know what I'm talkin' about, gents, an' that's why I said it."

"If that's the case, come an' have a drink, young feller!" and before Wild could divine his intention, a big, burly fellow had caught him by the shoulder and pulled him to the bar with a jerk.

Though our hero did not like this kind of treatment, he did not say anything, but took it good-naturedly, since the fellow seemed to be a friend to Easy Edward.

"Set out ther best whiskey in ther house!" roared the man, bringing his fist down upon the bar with a bang that made the glasses dance. "Nothin' is too good for Young

Wild West. Easy Edward never recommends any one unless he means it."

"Say, Mel!" exclaimed Easy, catching the man by the sleeve, "our young friend don't drink anything strong, an' though I ain't that way myself, I give him credit for it. I calculate he'll take a smoke or some ginger pop, or some-thin' like that with you."

"An' I calculate that he'll take whiskey!" was the reply. "If he's what you say he is, he'll drink whiskey with Mel Martin when he's asked."

"So this is the man I came over to see, is it?" thought Wild. "Well, I suppose I will have to go a little easy with him."

The big man still had his hand upon the boy's shoulder, and when he strove to step back he tightened his grip and brought him up to the bar again.

"Pour out your drink, Young Wild West," he shouted, as though he was talking to a deaf person. "We'll have a drink, an' then I want to talk business with you. I expected you over, an' I'm mighty glad to hear Easy Edward speak of you so highly. That makes me believe that we will have no trouble in makin' a deal on ther property I've got in Weston. Come, now! Pour out a stiff horn. You've got to drink with Mel Martin, or lose his friendship."

"See here, Mr. Martin!" and Wild threw the man's hand from his shoulder and stepped back a pace. "I have never swallowed a glass of whiskey in my life, and I am not going to do it now. I appreciate your good intentions, and I do not want to lose your friendship, but I can't drink whiskey, no matter what happens. I will take a cigar and smoke to your health."

"Do you mean what you say, boy?" roared the man, his face flushing with anger. "Do you mean that you won't take a drink of whiskey with me?"

"I certainly do," was the reply, in a voice that was full of firmness.

The angry expression gradually relaxed into a smile.

"You remind me of a preacher I fell afoul of a few years ago," Mel Martin said. "He refused to drink liquor with me, an' do you know what I done?"

"I am sure I do not, Mr. Martin."

Easy Edward had stepped back out of the way.

There was a quiet smile on his face.

He knew what was coming.

So did Cheyenne Charlie and the rest.

But those who had been in the place when they entered did not.

They only knew that they were looking at as cool a young fellow as they had ever set eyes upon.

They liked the boy for speaking as he had, and there were those among them who would not hesitate to take his part if Mel Martin went too far with him.

But they little thought that he wanted no one to take his part.

He could do that himself.

"Well, if you don't know what I done to ther preacher," cried Martin, "I'll tell yer. I made him drink!"

"I don't doubt it. But I might as well tell you that, in my opinion, it was no credit to you to do such a thing. You surely don't intend to make me drink, do you?"

"That's jest what I do."

As the man said this he looked just the least bit surprised.

He could not quite understand what the coolness Wild was displaying meant.

"Well, then, before we go any further, let me tell you that several men—some of them as big as you are—have tried to make me drink liquor when I didn't want to drink it; and none of them made me do it, either. Now, are you willing to let it drop and have a nice smoke with me?"

"Let it drop!" gasped Martin. "Well, I guess not! You are goin' to drink with me, I say! Here, put this into you, an' hurry up about it. I mean business now!"

He thrust out a glass half filled with liquor as he said this and reached for Wild's shoulder again.

"I mean business, too, Mr. Martin!" and then Young Wild West knocked the glass from his hand, and catching the big man on his hip, sent him sprawling on the floor.

"Whew!"

"Gee-whizz!"

"What do you think of that?"

The miners in the barroom were amazed.

They could not believe their senses.

Big Mel Martin, who was said to be one of the strongest men in Deadwood, had been thrown sprawling on the floor by a mere boy!

And a glass of whiskey knocked from his hand, too!

That offense alone would have been sufficient to cause Martin to let fly with his revolver.

The big man got upon his feet very quickly for one of his weight.

He had his hand on his revolver to draw it before he had quite straightened up.

"Take your hand away from there, Mr. Martin. If you don't we will never be able to make a deal about the piece of property. Do as I say!" emphasizing the words.

Martin was in a passion when he started to get up.

His face was distorted with rage.

And so it was till he made a move to draw his shooter.

When the stirring command rang in his ears and he saw himself covered by the revolver of Young Wild West, his expression changed.

Once more he looked amazed.

"Wh-a-a-a-at!" he stammered.

"Nothing much," answered Wild. "I simply told you that you were not going to make me drink whiskey. You said you were, and I didn't drink it! That's all!"

"Hooray for Young Wild West!" yelled Easy Edward, unable to hold in any longer.

Almost every man in the place joined in the cheering, and the noise made the rafters of the building fairly ring.

Mel Martin picked up his hat from the floor, and then without saying a word to any one, left the bar, going out into the street.

"He's sore—awful sore, but he'll come around all right,"

observed the man behind the bar. "Mel won't bear you any grudge for what yer done, Young Wild West. When he gits sober an' thinks it over he'll feel mighty ashamed of himself 'cause you handled him ther way you did afore a crowd. But he won't bear you any grudge. I knows him too well for that."

"That's right, Bob!" exclaimed Easy Edward. "I know Mel Martin well enough for that, too. But I know Young Wild West a great deal better, an' ther minute Mel grabbed him by ther shoulder an' yanked him up to ther bar I knowed there was goin' to be trouble, an' that Mel was ther one who was goin' to git ther worst of it. Set 'em up for all hands! It's too bad Mel got mad an' went out."

All this while Jim Dart, Cheyenne Charlie, Jack Robedee and Lively Rick had not said a word.

But the men in the barroom had taken notice that they kept just as cool as their young leader did.

"I'll bet that if any one had interfered they'd have cleaned ther place in no time," one of them, who had been favorably struck by our hero's action, remarked to the fellow next to him.

"I reckon so. I wouldn't want to be the one to try it," was the rejoinder. "That Young Wild West are what I calls a hurricane on wheels!"

Wild took a soft drink when Easy Edward treated the crowd, no one making the least objection to his doing so, and then he called for the cigars and invited every one to smoke.

There were one or two there who never smoked a cigar, but they did not refuse them.

It was just possible that the dashing boy might insist on them smoking, they thought.

But Young Wild West was not that kind of a fellow.

They could take what they liked.

"Now," observed our hero, when everybody was smoking as though their very lives depended upon it, "Mr. Landlord, can we get accommodations here for a few days?"

"Yes, sirree!" was the reply. "You kin git ther best ther house affords."

"Thank you! Kindly have our horses cared for at once, then."

The proprietor got a hustle on him, and in five minutes the five horses were comfortably located in the stalls in the commodious stable in the rear of the building.

Then two large rooms, each containing two full-sized beds, on the second floor front, were turned over to them.

"I guess this will do!" remarked Jack Robedee. "This hotel seems to be on a little higher scale than Brown's Gazoo over in Weston."

"Yes; everything is on a more improved scale, except the people. I did have an idea that Weston was going to beat Deadwood all hollow, but this town lies right in the center of the richest part of the country, and that is what gives it the advantage," Wild answered, as he went to the washstand and proceeded to get rid of the dust and travel stains.

"It's called a bad town, but I reckon it ain't so very bad, after all," said Charlie, as he followed the example set by

the young Prince of the Saddle. "If Mel Martin is a sample of ther bad men in Deadwood, I reckon we won't have a hard time of it while we stop here. Why, I didn't even git a chance to draw my gun, or even say a word."

"I am sorry I had any trouble with Martin," our hero remarked, a few minutes later. "I have an idea that he will have a grudge against me, in spite of what Easy Edward said. It strikes me that he is that kind of a man."

"Me, too," echoed the five companions, in a breath.

They were all pretty good judges of human nature, and they could generally size up a man for what he was.

And they were all about right, as far as Mel Martin went, as the sequel will prove.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TERROR OF TAPER TOP SHOWS HOW POLITE HE CAN BE.

There were seven passengers in the stagecoach that left Baldtown for Deadwood at eleven o'clock on the day our friends arrived at the town that had the reputation of being so "bad."

They consisted of a young married couple, a wealthy mine owner, who had been on a trip East, and four tenderfeet fresh from the paving blocks of the cities on their way to the heart of the Black Hills.

The young married couple were a comely looking pair.

They were Mr. and Mrs. Charles Peterson, and one of them had never visited the Wild West before.

That one was the bride. She had always lived in the city of St. Louis, and so had the groom until about a year before.

He had journeyed to the gold regions, promising that when he struck it rich he would come back and wed her.

Peterson had kept his word.

He had been very successful as a miner, and when he thought he could keep a wife in such luxury as that portion of the country provided, he wrote his promised bride to get ready to be married and come West with him as soon as the ceremony could be performed.

And the girl, loyal and true to him, immediately wrote back for him to "come on."

Peterson's interests in Deadwood were worth too much to leave there, and as he had become used to the ways of the country and the people in it, he was satisfied to remain there permanently.

And the bride was willing to go there and share his lot with him.

The wealthy mine owner was a very stout man of middle age.

He had been a poor man once upon a time, but his good fortune had given him the opinion that he was several pegs above the common run of people, and he had a way of ignoring every one he came in contact with, unless he was pretty sure that they were worth as much as he was.

And so it was when the passengers got into the stage.

The mine owner, who was really not much better fixed than Peterson, managed to find the most comfortable seat, and then he proceeded to act the part of the hog, taking no part whatever in the conversation that sprang up.

One of the tenderfeet was a chum of Peterson, named Aleck Cole.

He was a New Yorker, and he had met his friend in St. Louis for the purpose of coming to Deadwood with him to better his fortunes.

The other three "greenies," as the driver had called them when he was talking to the guard who went along to protect the outfit from road agents and bad Indians, were strangers.

But they seemed to be pleasant and affable fellows, and very anxious to get to the end of their journey.

They had already ridden ninety miles in stagecoaches to Baldtown, and now they had but thirty miles to go.

The journey had been very tiresome to them, as it had been to the bride of Peterson, but as nothing had happened to disturb them on the way, they were as light-hearted as ever.

When they had gone about five miles, the mine owner, who was becoming more cross as the journey proceeded, called out to the driver and asked him why he did not whip up the horses a little.

"Ther road is too rough to go any faster," was the reply. "Jest keep your shirt on, mister, an' we'll git to Deadwood on time."

"How dare you talk to me that way?" cried the crabbed man, acting as though he was not used to hearing such language, and making a miserable failure of the acting at the same time.

"You shet up!" was the calm retort, and then the rest of the passengers smiled.

This made the old fellow madder than ever.

"What are you looking at?" he demanded, fiercely, picking out Aleck Cole, the tenderfoot, as the one to vent his feelings upon.

"I beg your pardon, my dear sir," was the reply. "I guess this is a public conveyance, and if a person feels like laughing, they have a perfect right to do so."

"But you was laughin' at me."

The mine owner had dropped his pompous way of speaking in his anger, thus showing what he was—a lucky miner with a swelled head.

"Well, if I was laughing at you I could not help it. I won't do it again, unless you make me. There! Does that suit you for an apology?"

"Suit me! Why, I'll fill you full of lead for that insult!"

He made a move as though he was going to draw a revolver, and then Peterson spoke up.

"Stop that, old man!" he cried. "If you go to do any shooting here, I'll take a hand."

"You mind your own business," was the snappy rejoinder. "You've got all you kin attend to with billin' an'

cooin' an' makin' a fool out of yourself with your young bride, I guess."

This retort caused another smile to pass around, and Peterson, thinking he was the butt or it, sprang over and gave the old man's nose a twist.

"Now, if you don't shut up I'll throw you out!" he said.

The strangers expected there would be a fight in the vehicle then, but there was not.

The starch had been completely taken from the mine owner, and he did not offer to resent the insult to his red-tipped proboscis.

He turned pale, however, and then evidently thinking that the young miner would keep his word, he settled back in his seat, and had nothing further to say.

Nor did he pay any further attention to the rest of the passengers for the next few hours to come.

Meanwhile the stagecoach rattled along, sometimes at a snail's pace as they were ascending some hill, and then again with a rattle and bang down some deep descent.

Several times the passengers were pitched from their seats, and once when the old man went flat on his stomach, Peterson helped him up, with the remark: "There you are, sir. I hope you ain't hurt."

But he did not even thank him, though his face did relax into just the vestige of a pleasant look.

When darkness overtook them, the outfit was in the wildest section of the country that the tenderfeet and the bride had yet passed through.

The driver halted the tired horses at the foot of a steep hill to give them a blow, and the guard got down from the top of the vehicle, and opening the door, said:

"When we git to ther top of ther hill you folks wants to hold on tight. We've got a mighty rough road down ther mountain for about three miles, an' then we'll have plain sailin' all ther way into Deadwood."

Every one thanked him for his information except the mine owner.

He was too grouty to thank any one, let alone the common guard of an old tumble-down stagecoach.

He was right on his dignity again.

Peterson had traveled the road on more than one occasion and he knew all about the rough descent, but he was not of the sort to let the guard's warning go by unnoticed.

In a few minutes the horses started, and the tedious ascent was soon made.

"Now comes the rocky road to Dublin," Tenderfoot Cole remarked as the outfit started down the hill with a bump and a jar that made them think they were surely going over.

Rattle, clatter, bump!

Down they went, six of the passengers laughing merrily, and the seventh scowling as though it was all the fault of the driver, and that he was doing it on purpose.

But as much as the others were laughing, they were glad when the foot of the long hill was reached.

The plain sailing into Deadwood had now begun, and the old man settled into an easy position with a grunt of approval.

There was yet ten miles to be covered, but as the way was comparatively smooth, it would not take them so very long.

Just about three miles had been made when the stage-coach came to a stop with such a jar that Tenderfoot Cole went flying into the lap of the grouty mine owner.

But before the old man could expostulate the sharp report of a revolver rang out, followed by the command:

"The first one who moves hand or foot will die! The Terror of Taper Top demands his toll!"

"Lord save us!" groaned the old fellow, seizing Peterson by the arm. "Don't let me get robbed, young fellow! I'll make it all right with you."

But Peterson had too much to attend to just then to pay any attention to him.

His young wife was so badly frightened that she was on the verge of hysterics.

The young miner knew just what had happened.

He had heard of the terror of Taper Top, and he knew the stagecoach had been held up by him.

He also felt thankful that it had happened coming back, for if he had been robbed on his way to St. Louis he would have lost a big sum of money.

Now he had little left of what he had taken with him.

Aleck Cole had drawn his revolver, ready to make a fight for it.

"Don't!" his friend said. "If you shot one of the villains we would all get riddled. Let them take what you have got; that is the best way."

Just then both doors of the coach were opened and a number of revolvers were thrust inside.

"Hands up!" said a voice.

Every one obeyed the command but the young woman, and she had fainted and could not.

"That's sensible, I do declare!" exclaimed the Terror, as he flashed a bull's-eye lantern in front of him and showed his blond mustache and goatee to the passengers.

"You can put your hands down now," he added. "Just use them to hand over what valuables you have got, and be sure that you don't miss any. Hurry a little, please. We can't tarry here all night, you know. Ah! thank you, young fellow," as Cole handed over his pocket-book and watch and chain. "Small favors thankfully received," as Peterson passed over his rather lean purse and was in the act of removing the ring from the finger of his unconscious wife. "Never mind that! You are a newly wed couple, I can see that. Let the woman keep her wedding ring, but give me everything else you have."

"I am much obliged to you for that," retorted Peterson, who was the coolest of all the passengers. "Here is everything we have between us, save the clothes we have."

"I was once on a wedding trip myself," resumed the blond villain, as he took the articles. "I know how it feels to be held up by gentlemen of the road, for I experienced it once before I went into the business. I don't know but you can have these earrings back. I can't say that I have any use for them, and they are not worth a great deal, anyhow."

The young miner accepted the trinkets as coolly as though he was merely enjoying the joke, and Tim Talbot smiled and tipped his hat to the unconscious bride.

Then he turned his attention to the other three tenderfeet.

"Hand over the toll, please, gentlemen," he went on, blandly. "I know it is rather hard, but it must be done, you know. This is a very dangerous business, and we have to get paid well when we work. There is a price on my head now, and if I get caught I will surely be hung. I don't believe there is any one here who would like to see me dance on nothing with a rope around my neck, even if the toll I demand is somewhat exorbitant. 'Pon my soul! I do think you are the most civil and obliging lot of people I have met in some time. You needn't mind it so much, though, gentlemen. There is plenty of gold to be dug out of the Black Hills yet, and there is no doubt that you will get your full share of it, if you only work. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"

There was only one passenger left who had not been relieved of his belongings, and that was the millionaire.

The polite scoundrel had sized him up when he first looked in through the door of the vehicle, and as he had known what passengers were booked to come from Baldtown, he left him to the last.

He was quite sure that the main part of the haul would be made from him, as he had learned that he always carried a big pile of money with him.

And this was indeed a fact, for the grouty old man would not trust his money in a bank when he was away, save that which was in the form of securities.

He had something like ten thousand dollars in his clothes at that very minute, and as frightened as he was, he did not want to give it up to save his life.

There was a broad smile on the face of the highwayman as he turned to the grouty man.

"Please be so kind and obliging as to hand over your mite," he observed, holding the lantern so its rays flashed full upon the countenance of the victim.

The scoundrel had changed his revolver to the same hand that held the lantern, but his weapon was not needed to keep the passengers in submission, since the men standing on either side of the vehicle had them all covered.

"I haven't got over twenty dollars with me," gasped the grouty mine owner, a cold sweat breaking out on his brow.

"Well, hand that over, then."

With an unmistakable sigh of relief, he did so.

"You are sure this is all you have with you?"

"Yes; that is every cent. I don't know what I will do when I get to Deadwood."

"My fat friend, it strikes me that you are telling an untruth. Just search your clothes and see if you can't find a fat wallet somewhere. Come! hurry up. It would be rather unpleasant for us if the sheriff and a crowd of his deputies were to appear just now. Our time is limited. What! Not going to look for the wallet? Well, then, I will do it for you."

With a quick move Tim Talbot seized the man by the lapel of his coat and pulled him headforemost out of the coach.

The victim landed on the ground upon all fours, and before he could get righted up the deft fingers of the polite outlaw captain had ripped open his vest and taken the wallet that was stowed in the inside pocket.

Then the grouty old man received a good kick that sent him rolling to the side of the road.

"That is for lying," remarked Talbot, with a laugh. "Now, then, I guess the stagecoach can proceed. We won't bother you any further, gentlemen. Pleasant dreams to the bride and groom. May they live a very happy life, indeed, and always remember the night that Tim Talbot, the Terror of Taper Top, paid his respects to them. I wish you all a pleasant good——"

"Hold on, cap!" interrupted Valdez, the Mexican. "I want to a stick my knife in the a man who was a just married. He leave a nice a widow then."

"Never mind that. He is too civil a young fellow to be bothered with any further. We will let them go on to Deadwood, and they will think all the more of us for it."

"But I want to have some fun," insisted the heartless brute.

He had his long-bladed knife in his hand, and seemed to be itching to use it.

"We have had all the fun we want just now. Come on!" "No!"

"You say no to me!" and with that Tim Talbot struck the Mexican a blow over the eye with the butt of his heavy Colt's revolver.

Down went Valdez like a log, and then, just as though nothing had happened, the Terror of Taper Top once more bade the passengers good-night.

The doors of the stagecoach were then slammed to and a word to the driver caused him to ply his whip, and away galloped the horses, leaving the grouty mine owner sitting at the side of the road, and the body of the guard, who had been shot by the Terror because he showed fight, lying where it fell.

It had been a very good haul, indeed, and when he had himself helped the dazed Mexican into the saddle, Tim Talbot gave the word to return to their quarters in the cave at the foot of Taper Top.

CHAPTER V.

TIM TALBOT MEETS YOUNG WILD WEST AGAIN.

Young Wild West and his friends were very well taken care of at the hotel that night.

They came to the conclusion the next morning at the breakfast table that they could not have struck a better place to put up at during their stay in Deadwood.

After breakfast they concluded to take a walk about town,

so as soon as they had looked at their horses and found them all right, they went out.

There was not the promise of a good day before them, as far as the weather was concerned, as the clouds were heavy with rain.

"We will walk around the thickly settled part a bit, and then if it does not rain this afternoon, we will ride about and look at the mines," said Wild, as they sauntered up the street.

"That's it!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie. "I want to see what that smelting works looks like."

They had not walked very far before they noticed a very respectable-looking barber shop, and it struck our hero just then that he needed a shave.

Charlie was the only one who wore a beard, and when they all said they guessed they would let the Deadwood barbers have a try at their faces, he remarked that he would go in with them.

"A barber earns his money easily when he tackles my face," laughed Jim. "Though I am anxious to raise a mustache like Rick has some day, I am afraid I will never be able to do it. As far as a beard is concerned, I guess I take after my grandmother."

"Well, I am not much better off than you, Jim," retorted Wild. "I don't have to get shaved only about every two weeks; and then if I neglected it it wouldn't be noticed."

"I generally shave myself," remarked Robedee. "But I am going to let a barber do it now, just for the sake of seein' how it feels."

"I reckon you'll have a hard time doin' that," said Charlie with a grin.

"How?"

"Seein' how it feels, I mean. You mean feelin' how it feels. You never seen your feelin's, did you?"

"It seems to me that you are pretty exact," retorted Jack. "You seem to be pretty bright this mornin'. Now, s'posin' a baby was layin' on its back with its fingers on its eyes, what would it be doin'?"

"I don't know. What would it be doin'?"

"Feelin' how it sees, of course! An' then if ther baby was to take down its hands an' look at its fingers, it would be seein' how it feels. If that ain't right I don't know what I am talkin' about. How about it, Wild?"

"I guess you are right, Jack. Charlie, you want to look out how you pick him up."

They were now at the door of the barber shop, so dropping the subject, they went in, all being satisfied that Robedee had the best of the argument.

There were three chairs in the shop, with a man working at each.

There was no one in waiting, so they were next, and they sat down.

In spite of the rainy aspect of the morning, it was very warm and close, so Wild took off his hat.

The three barbers looked from the faces they were shaving and nodded at them, and the boss wished them a good-morning.

"Next!" called out one of the barbers, as he finished the customer in the chair.

"Go ahead, Wild," said Jim, so our hero got up and took the chair as soon as the other customer got out of it.

Before Wild was finished Jim and Jack were in the other two chairs.

When our hero got out and paid the barber a door at the side of the room opened and Mel Martin thrust his head in the room.

"Hello, Young Wild West!" he observed with a show of surprise. "I did not expect to see you so soon this morning. Well, I may as well tell you right here before every one, that I made a fool of myself yesterday and I am sorry for it. I am not the man to hold a grudge, and if I had not been drinking too much yesterday when you was introduced at the hotel, I shouldn't have acted like I did. I was coming over to the hotel to see you about the property over in Weston; but since you are here we can attend to the business right now. Step in here; this is an adjunct to the barber shop, and you can buy both whiskey and cigars here. I want you to have a good cigar with me before we get down to business."

"All right, Mr. Martin," replied our hero. "I suppose we can fix up the business now as well as any other time. We can have a talk over it, anyway."

He did not hesitate to step into the adjoining room with the man, though he had a slight suspicion that he did not feel as friendly as he made out to.

But Young Wild West knew no fear.

If Mel Martin attempted anything that was at all treacherous he would be apt to find that he had made a mistake.

It was not a very large room that they stepped into.

There was a bar in one end of it, and scattered about were some chairs and a couple of tables.

"Let us have a couple of your best cigars," said Martin to the man behind the bar, who was the only one there when they entered.

As Wild followed him to the bar a door that was almost behind opened noiselessly and a man wearing a heavy red beard slid into the room.

Our hero was not aware of his presence until the newcomer sprang upon him and grabbed his revolvers from his belt.

Mel Martin whipped out his shooter as quick as a flash and in a whisper exclaimed:

"Make a single cry, Young Wild West, and you will die. I brought you in here to do business with you, and I want to do it to my own satisfaction. Hold up your hands!"

At that instant another man entered the room.

He was unquestionably a Mexican, and he had a bandage over one of his eyes.

The boy saw that he was in for it, so instead of raising his hands, he dealt Martin a blow with his fist between the eyes that sent him flat upon his back on the floor.

The red-whiskered fellow rushed upon him then, and the scoundrel with the bandage over his eye moved toward the end of the bar.

"You may as well give in, young fellow!" exclaimed the red-bearded man. "We are bound to have you."

Wild then caught the villain by the throat and pushed him back on the table.

The Mexican seized a hammer and rushed upon the boy. Just then Cheyenne Charlie, revolver in hand, opened the door.

"Drop that hammer, you yaller-skinned coyote!" cried the scout. "Wild, I reckon I come jest in time, didn't I?"

"Yes, Charlie," panted our hero, who had now worked one of his hands to the throat of the scoundrel he was holding on the table, and was gripping on it so tightly that he was choking him. "Call the others in! I guess we had better make examples of these fellows."

"Jim Jack! Lively! Come in here!" shouted Cheyenne.

The three burst in through the doorway in double-quick time, and just as they did so half a dozen villainous-looking men came pouring in through the other door.

Young Wild West let go his hold upon the man he had been holding down and seized the revolvers that were in his belt.

"Back, you hounds!" he cried, in a ringing voice. "I came in this room to do business with Mel Martin, and I am going to do it. The man who interferes will die!"

Seizing the opportunity before him, the fellow Wild had had released his grip upon slipped from the table and made a bolt for the door that opened into the street.

As he did so the red beard fell from his face, and then our friends saw that he was no other than Tim Talbot, the Terror of Taper Top.

Wild was as much surprised as any of them when he saw this.

He did not act as quickly as he would have otherwise done.

The result of it was that Talbot got out on the street and reached his horse, which was tied in front of the place.

He mounted and darted off just as our hero reached the door.

Two or three teams happened to be in range at the time, so he did not fire at the escaping villain.

If it had not been for the fact that they were right in the heart of a hustling town he would have taken his chances on winging the desperate highwayman.

Meanwhile the rest of the scoundrels had got out of the room with the single exception of Mel Martin.

Jack Robedee had seized him as he attempted to get up, having heard Wild say that he wanted to do business with him, and that he meant to do it.

Charlie and the others could easily have dropped some of the villains, but as they did not offer to draw their revolvers when they saw Talbot make his escape to the street, they let them alone.

The man behind the bar was trembling in his boots when Young Wild West came back into the room.

"What does all this mean, gentlemen?" he asked, speaking in a frightened way.

"I rather think you know all about it," replied our hero, as he motioned Martin to sit down at the table.

"Upon my honor I do not!" cried the man. "I run a respectable place, though it is small, and I'm tryin' my best to make an honest livin'. When Mr. Martin brought you in here I did not know there was any one in the back yard. The men must have went through the lane that leads to the barn. I am telling you the truth, sir."

Wild looked hard at the fellow and made up his mind that he was honest.

"Perhaps you are telling the truth," he said. "I hope you are for your own good. But, Mr. Martin," and he turned to the villain who had so nearly played a successful game on him.

"See here!" exclaimed Martin, looking about him in a hopeless way; "if I tell you all about it will you believe me?"

"I can't say that I will. To be plain with you, I think you are a sneaking villain, and that you would as leave cut a throat as eat. If you have anything to say, you can say it, though."

"I can get some of the best citizens in town to testify to my general character," retorted the big man, wincing at Wild's words.

"Perhaps you can. What you might call the best citizens might be the worst. The Terror of Taper Top is not a good citizen, is he?"

"I did not know he was here."

"Perhaps you did not. Well, go ahead, if you have got anything to say, and say it quickly."

"Well, I come to ther conclusion that I'd try an' work about double what ther property was worth out of you."

Martin was now speaking in the style of the general run of the inhabitants again.

"You meant to scare me into paying you double what it was worth, did you?"

"That's it exactly. I met the gang of men who rushed in here down on ther corner. Some of 'em I knew by sight an' ther rest I had never seen afore. I told them that Young Wild West was in ther barber shop an' that I wanted to scare him into makin' a bargain with me. I told three of 'em to go through ther lane an' come around to ther back door of this place, an' when I got you in here they was to come in an' hold revolvers at your head while I struck ther bargain with you."

"That sounds quite plausible, too. But you are not such a fool as to think anything like that would work on me, especially after our meeting yesterday afternoon, are you?"

"No, I ain't now, but I was a little while ago."

"Well, if that was your scheme, it didn't work. And any other scheme you might have been trying to work failed, too. Now, Mr. Mel Martin, do you know what I want you to do?"

"Tell me an' I'll do it."

The man's tone was nothing if not humble now.

"I want you to go to the mayor, the cashier of the bank, and four other prominent citizens of Deadwood and get

them to recommend you as being an honest, law-abiding citizen. Can you do it?"

"Yes, I kin do that easy enough."

"All right. Go and do it, then. I will meet you at the hotel we are stopping at in two hours from now, and if the recommendations are satisfactory I'll do business with you in regard to the sale of the property."

"Thank you, Young Wild West. You are ther whitest man I ever met. You are just what Easy Edward said you was, though I didn't believe it at the time. I'll be at ther hotel in two hours from now, or lose a leg."

"Look out you don't lose more than a leg. You will lose your whole body if you try to work any more dirty tricks on me."

"I mean just what I say, Young Wild West."

"So do I."

"I know you do. I want you to shoot me if you catch me doin' anything ag'in you, from this time out."

"All right, Mr. Martin. You can go now."

Glad of the opportunity, Martin got up and left the place.

Wild then bought cigars for the five of them, and then they went back into the barber shop.

Lively Rick had not been shaved, and he got into the chair.

The barbers were much surprised at what had occurred.

The three of them were united in saying that the keeper of the bar in the adjoining room was a good sort of man, and not one who would take a part in such a thing as had just taken place.

"It is too bad we couldn't have held on to Talbot, ther Terror," said Cheyenne Charlie.

The barbers looked at him in astonishment.

That was the first that they had heard of the famous outlaw being there.

"Was he in there?" gasped the boss.

"He was, and I had him pressed back on a table," answered Wild. "But I did not know it was him, as he had a false beard on."

"And if you had held on to him you would have got a thousand dollars from the sheriff."

"Yes; I suppose so, if I had demanded it."

"Well, you most likely would have demanded it, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, I suppose so."

"And now it will be hard to catch him, as it ain't likely he will venture into Deadwood again."

"Oh, I think he will come back. He has got an idea that he is invincible, and this will only make him more daring. He will be caught before many days, see if he isn't."

"Did you hear about his holding up the stagecoach last night?" went on the barber, who had nothing to do but talk just then.

"No; we haven't heard of it."

"Well the Terror of Taper Top held up the stagecoach last night seven miles out of here. He made a clean sweep of it, with the exception of taking a bride's wedding ring

and her earrings. Two of the men who were in the coach were here this morning, and they told me all about it. One of them is a regular customer at the shop here. He is Charles Peterson, who went to St. Louis to get married. He was in the coach with his wife and a friend who met him and came out here with him. There were four more passengers, and one of them was a rich old fellow who owns several mines in the Hills. The Terror treated them all quite decent but the old fellow, who lied about what money he had. He pulled him out into the road and made the driver come on to town with the horses on a hot gallop. The guard was shot at the first go-off, but he was the only one, as not another shot was fired."

Young Wild West was much interested in the recital of this adventure.

He began to think that Tim Talbot was one of the most daring scoundrels he had ever met.

The man must certainly possess great nerve to venture into town after making a hold-up the night before.

He resolved right then and there to help the sheriff break up the outlaw gang and bring the Terror of Taper Top to justice.

CHAPTER IV.

WILD MAKES THE DEAL WITH MARTIN.

Our friends left the barber shop and took a walk around town.

They cut it short, however, as it had begun to rain pretty hard, and they did not feel in the humor to get soaked to the skin.

They hired a rig to take them back to the hotel, and as they were being driven past one of the most gaudy looking saloons in the town, Jim called our hero's attention to a man who was just about to enter the place.

It was the Mexican who had been in the act of striking Young Wild West on the head with a hammer when Charlie entered the room in time to nip him in the bud.

They could tell him by the bandage over his eye, if by no other way.

"Ah!" exclaimed Wild, "it now strikes me that I noticed that same fellow with the outlaws yesterday. He has been wounded since that time, and that is why he carries the bandage. I wonder what kind of a reputation that place has got? I will have to find out, for I would not be surprised if it is a hangout for the Terror of Taper Top."

A rather elaborate sign over the door bore the inscription:

JOHNNY'S JOINT.

There was also a Chinese sign on the building, too, and this made our hero think it was a rather tough place.

"We must not fail to drop in there before we leave Deadwood," he remarked.

"There's opium smokers there, I'll bet!" said Lively Rick. "I was in a place like that in Denver when I was out there. It had a Chinese sign on it that looked just like this one."

"Did yer try any of ther opium smokin' when you was in it?" Jack asked.

"Yes; I thought I'd take in everything there was in town, so I bought a pipe, as they called it. It was ther worst dose I ever got, I think, for when I woke up I'd been robbed of everything I had 'cept my clothes. I was lucky enough to strike a feller I knowed, after I got out, an' he give me a job to earn money enough to git out of the town. That was my first opium smokin', an' you kin bet it will be my last, too."

"They say that when you git to sleep from the stuff it makes you dream that angels are flying around you an' peltin' you with red roses an' cologne," spoke up Charlie.

"I guess I didn't git ther right kind of a dose, then, for about all I dreamed about was that ther old boy was chasin' me with a red-hot pitchfork, an' when I woke up my head felt as though it was jammed into an ore-crusher, while my feet felt as though some one was stickin' ten thousand needles in 'em. Don't talk opium to me! It may be all right for some feller what has lost all ther nerves he ever had an' is all ther time wishin' he was dead; but for a sound person of common sense! Well, I reckon he'd be a fool to try it, knowin' as much as I do about it."

"I don't think any of us want to try it," said Wild. "But I do think all of us would like to pay a visit to Johnny's Joint. I want to go there just to see if I am not right when I think it is a sort of headquarters for Tim Talbot when he is in Deadwood."

"And we will go there, by all means," observed Jim.

When they got back to the hotel they were surprised to find Mel Martin waiting there.

The two hours was not yet up, but he had not been idle, and getting there ahead of time, he had sat down to wait.

"I am here, Young Wild West," he said, as our hero walked up to him. "I've been to see the people you spoke about, an' I have got the seven recommendations."

Sure enough, he did have that number, and they were from the mayor, cashier of the bank, and four other men who were supposed to live in Deadwood.

Wild read them over and found that they all spoke well of the man.

Then he took them to the proprietor of the hotel and asked him if he could identify the signatures.

Four of them he could readily enough, but the rest he said he had not seen enough times to tell whether they were genuine or not.

"From what you know of Mel Martin, he bears a pretty fair character, then?" our hero questioned.

"Yes; outside of his bein' a gambler, an' somewhat of a speculator, I never heard anythin' ag'in him," was the reply.

"Well, I guess I will do business with him, then."

"Did you make him git these signers before you would do business with him?" queried the landlord in surprise.

"I felt it necessary, so I did. You see, he tried a trick on me this morning that might have resulted in me being put

out of the way," and then Wild told him what had happened in the room adjoining the barber shop.

"Well, I swan! I never thought he would do anything like that. You kin bet that he did not mean to kill you. He might have been goin' to scare you into givin' a good price for the property. 'Tain't likely he knowed that it was Tim Talbot he was gittin' to help him. Well, that beats me! I never heard anything like it before!"

Young Wild West went back to Martin and told him to come to a private room with them.

He wanted his companions present to witness whatever verbal agreement they could come to.

"I'm glad you're satisfied, Young Wild West," remarked the big man, as he took a seat. "I have done somethin' for you that I wouldn't have done for a regiment of soldiers before I met you. I never wanted to clear myself so much in my life as I did this morning when that thing happened in that barroom. You see, I had done such things before in makin' deals, an' I never thought but that it was all right. If you kin scare a feller into makin' a deal it is a deal, you know."

"It is taking a mean, cowardly advantage, you mean."

"Well, I reckon it is. Now, what will you give me for the property that lies next to your piece in Weston?"

"What do you ask for it?"

"I've never been there even to look at it, so I don't know how much it is worth. I only know what I paid for it, an' what was told me when I bought it."

"Well, you ought to be able to place a figure on it, then."

Mel Martin rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

He was getting right down to business now.

"I'll tell you what I'll do!" he exclaimed. "I gave three thousand dollars for the property on a blind deal, an' I'll sell it to you for the same money, an' in ther same way."

"Done!" cried Wild.

He had expected to pay as much as five thousand for the piece of land, and here it was offered to him for a little more than half that sum.

"An' you'll pay the recordin' fee?" said Martin.

"Yes; I'll do that."

"Give me a deposit, and I'll write a receipt to bind the bargain."

Young Wild West produced a bag from his pocket and took from it fifty dollars in gold.

"That pretty near breaks me, boys," he observed, looking at his friends.

"We'll make out with what we've got between us," spoke up Charlie.

Martin then wrote the receipt for the fifty dollars on account as Wild dictated, and the money changed hands.

"We will go to the recorder's office right away," observed our hero, "and as soon as I am satisfied that everything is all right, I'll write you my order on the bank of Weston for the balance of the money."

"That just suits me," was the reply.

It lacked a trifle over an hour before dinner time, so

they all left the hotel, and hiring a conveyance, went to the recorder's office.

The man they wanted to see was in, and after a search had been made through the necessary books, it was found that the property was in the name of Mel Martin, and that there were no incumbrances on it whatever.

It only took a few minutes to transfer the title, and then Wild wrote out an order for two thousand nine hundred and fifty dollars on the bank at Weston.

This he handed over to Martin, who thanked him warmly.

"Now," said our hero, as they left the office, "there is one question I would like to ask you, Mr. Martin."

"Go ahead an' ask it," was the reply.

"What were you going to make me pay for that property if your scheme had worked this morning?"

"About ten thousand dollars," and the man's face colored as he said it.

"This is quite a drop, then."

"Yes; an' I am glad of it. It is ther first thing I ever sold that I didn't make a good margin on, though, an' I am glad it is, for dealin' with you has learned me a good lesson."

"Well, I guess we are both satisfied, then. Good-mornin'! We may see you again before we leave Deadwood."

Our friends parted company with the man who had acted in such a peculiar way since the deal had been going on, and went to the hotel in time for dinner.

And Mel Martin, feeling better than he had in some time, though he did not know just why, set out for one of his favorite resorts.

It so happened that he concluded to go to the place called Johnny's Joint.

He was a confirmed gambler, and there was the place where any one could be accommodated in that line to their heart's content.

It was not far from where he parted with Young Wild West and his friends, and a few minutes later he walked into the place.

There was a little bit of everything to be had at Johnny's Joint, though gambling, opium smoking, and liquors, were the principal features.

It was a hotel, also, and more than one innocent tenderfoot who had hired a room there had never been seen or heard of after.

Martin was well aware of this, but he never took any part in things that led up to that.

He had always been content with getting a man's money by gambling squarely or otherwise, as the case might require.

But one thing he did know well, and that was that a good square meal could always be had at the restaurant part of the establishment.

The price for meals was higher than any other place in town, but that made no difference to Martin just then.

He had plenty of money, and he also had an order on the bank at Weston payable to him.

All he had to do was to take it to the Deadwood Bank and get it turned into cash, as Young Wild West had assured

him that he would send word to the bank and have it arranged for him to cash it in.

And the big man did not doubt the word of Young Wild West.

He had reason to believe in him pretty well.

It was noon when Martin walked into the restaurant, and the tables were pretty well filled up with gamblers, sporting miners, cowboys, and here and there a tenderfoot fresh from the East.

Martin looked around and presently saw a table that was being used by three men.

One of them was a stout, elderly man with a very pompous air, and the other two were bearded fellows wearing very sporty clothes.

There was just one vacant chair, and the big man thought that particular place was as good as any of the rest.

So he sat down and gave his order to the waiter.

All there of the men were strangers to him, and Martin was always on the lookout to make the acquaintance of strangers.

He had often led himself in the way of making money by striking up a quick friendship.

If he once got his man into a game of draw poker he was all right, for Mel Martin came out ahead in that game nine times out of ten.

"Nasty day, strangers," he observed, looking at all three with one sweeping glance.

"Yes," answered two of the men, the third not taking the trouble to answer.

"A rainy day always makes me feel uneasy," went on the big man. Then looking straight at the stout man, he added:

"What's the matter, my friend? You appear downhearted."

"I guess you'd feel downhearted, too, if you was robbed of every cent you had," was the reply, in a growling tone.

"I reckon I would. When was you robbed?"

"Last night, when the stagecoach was held up about seven miles out of town. The scoundrels were not satisfied with taking my money and watch and chain, but they pulled me out of the coach and made me foot it for the whole seven miles to here."

"How is it that you are able to buy your dinner if you were robbed of every cent you had last night?" asked the man sitting opposite to Martin, becoming very much interested, it seemed.

"Oh, my credit is good at almost any bank, I guess," was the boasting rejoinder. "I soon got fixed up when I got to this town. My name is Dolliver—Dan Dolliver, and I am interested in a few mines within a scope of two hundred miles or so."

"Why, do you mean to tell me that you are Dan Dolliver, the millionaire mine owner?" cried the man who had asked the rather impudent question.

"That's who I am, sir," and the old fellow swelled out his chest with a great show of pride.

"Put her there, Mr. Dolliver. I am more than pleased to have the pleasure of meeting you," and Dolliver, who was

really the grouty old man Tim Talbot had treated so harshly in the hold-up the night before, had his hand in the grip of the stranger and being wrung in a hearty fashion before he was aware of it.

"I guess I ain't going to get much of a show," thought Martin. "But I am going to have a try at it, anyhow."

"My name is Mel Martin," he exclaimed, seizing the fat man's hand the instant the other let go. "I am a well-known citizen around these diggin's. If I can be of any assistance to you, either financially or otherwise, Mr. Dolliver, I will be only too happy to oblige you."

"Thank you," answered Dolliver, thawing out wonderfully. "I am glad to meet you, gentlemen, I assure you."

He was speaking the best he knew how now, and was putting on all the dignity he could command, at the same time.

"My name is Webster," remarked the fellow who had wrung his hand so heartily. "I am a stranger here in town, but I guess I will make out all right, since I never had a quarrel with a person in all my life."

"And my name is Quirk," spoke up the remaining man at the table, just as the waiter came with the order that had been given at the table by the four. "What do you say if we have a nice quart bottle of champagne, gentlemen? It will serve to wash the dinner down better. I, too, am a stranger in these parts, an' I'd like to get acquainted with some good people."

All three were perfectly willing to do this, and they told him so.

The wine was promptly ordered, and as they drank it they became more friendly.

Martin was a little puzzled.

He felt certain that the two men were trying to work the same game he was trying for.

He also knew they were in disguise, since his sharp eyes had detected the beards they had on as being false.

Who were they?

That was the question that puzzled him.

"They are regular Deadwood crooks, I'll bet!" he thought. "But I can't seem to locate them. Well, I'll work the thing out, anyway, an' if they are after anything worse than gettin' the old fool into a game of poker, I'll look out for his interests, that's all."

Having come to this conclusion, Mel Martin proceeded to enjoy the meal, making himself as agreeable as he could.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GAME OF DRAW POKER.

The dinner in the restaurant of Johnny's Joint was prolonged into a rather lengthy affair.

The four men at the table not only enjoyed one bottle of champagne, but before they were ready to get up they had disposed of at least half a dozen.

And by that time they were all feeling as though they had known each other for years.

It was a game that was being played with two men on one side and one on the other.

And Dolliver, the egotistical mine owner, who had been robbed the night before, was the game sought after.

One by one the guests of the restaurant went out, and finally the four were the only ones remaining.

But they were good customers, and they were waited upon with the utmost politeness and prompt attention.

So well did Martin and the other men work their game that finally Dolliver gave a yawn and proposed that they play a friendly game of cards.

Webster, as he called himself, demurred a little, and Martin hesitated.

But they both consented to play, with the proviso that the stakes were to be small.

The other man said he did not know much about cards, but he would take a hand, just so he would not break up the party.

As they got up to go to the room where they were to play, Webster managed to get alongside of Martin and whisper in his ear:

"I know you, Martin, but you don't know me. We will pick the old fool and divide the proceeds between the three of us."

The big man nodded in the affirmative, though he did not know whether he would do it that way or not.

He was now more puzzled than ever to find out who the two disguised men were.

He had made up his mind only an hour or two before to lead a better life, but the temptation to gamble was too great for him, and he had even gone so far as to enter a conspiracy to rob an unsuspecting fellow creature.

But Mel Martin did not know Dolliver.

Neither did the other two men.

That is, as far as his gambling propensities were concerned.

They were to learn something about him, though, before they got through with him.

The four managed to get a nice quiet corner where they could have things pretty much to themselves.

There were three other tables in the room, but none of them were being used when they sat down.

The cards were brought and the game commenced.

It was for very light stakes at first, and the four seemed to be really enjoying the game.

The man named Quirk was the lucky man at the end of half an hour.

He had won something like a hundred dollars, and he showed great signs of elation.

Dolliver proposed that the ante be doubled, just to make it more interesting.

In spite of his pompous ways, the wealthy mine owner was an inveterate player of draw poker.

And he knew the game, too, both in an honest way and in a crooked way.

They played on till an hour had slipped by, and then

they found that with the exception of that which had gone to the house, they were pretty well evened up.

Every time either Martin or Webster fixed the cards for Dolliver, he refused to bite on the bait thrown him.

He would do just to the contrary to what they expected him to.

Finally Martin proposed that they raise the ante again.

"Certainly," said the fat man. "Make it as high as you like. I don't care. If I lose what money I have with me all I will have to do is to send over to the bank and get more."

"That's me, too, pardner," replied Martin. "I've got a check for twenty-nine hundred and fifty dollars in my pocket, which Young Wild West gave me this mornin'. If I find that I will need it, I will run over to ther bank an' git it cashed."

"So you have a check from Young Wild West, eh?" queried Webster, while Quirk looked interested.

"Yes; I sold him a piece of property over in Weston."

"The piece you expected to get ten thousand for, I suppose?"

Mel Martin gave a start.

It all flashed upon him now.

The two men with the beards were a couple of those he had got to assist him in working the scheme on Young Wild West that morning.

And it had been told to him that one of the men was no other than Tim Talbot, the Terror of Taper Top.

Was the villain now before him?

It could not be, he thought, after he had weighed the thing through his head for a few seconds.

Talbot would not have the nerve to come there, after what took place in the little saloon next to the barber shop.

The two disguised men must belong to his band, though, and that made the big man feel as though he would have to be a little careful how he acted.

"They think I am a genuine crook," he thought. "An' I don't wonder that they do, since they must have thought that I meant to kill Young Wild West this mornin'. Well, I'll let 'em think so. One thing, I won't give them away. I wouldn't give Tim Talbot away if he was here himself. He has his way of makin' a livin', an' I have mine."

A peculiar man was Mel Martin.

The playing went on again, and try as they might, the men could not fleece Dolliver out of a dollar.

On the other hand, he gradually kept adding to his winnings.

It was just at this stage of the game when half a dozen newcomers entered the room.

Martin looked up and gave a start when he saw that it was Young Wild West and his party who had come in.

And Dolliver looked surprised, too, when he saw that one of the six was Peterson, the young miner who had been a fellow passenger in the stagecoach when it was held up the night before.

He was in a much pleasanter mood than he had been

during the journey from Baldtown, and he spoke to the young man.

"How are you, young fellow?" he observed. "I see you are alive, after what happened last night."

"Oh, yes," replied Peterson, moving his chair closer to the table. "I got off a little luckier than you did."

"I know you did. I will get square on the Terror of Taper Top for the way he used me, see if I don't. As soon as I see the sheriff I am going to add another thousand dollars to the reward for the scoundrel, dead or alive. That ought to induce somebody to go the whole length to get him."

"Yes; that ought to be quite an inducement; but I hear the reward has already been doubled by the county officials."

"Is that so?" Martin asked, who knew Peterson quite well.

"Yes. Well, gentlemen, since we are all here together, I would like to introduce you to some friends of mine. This is Young Wild West, the Prince of the Saddle, dead-shot and town boomer. No doubt you have all heard of him, if you haven't met him."

"I am glad to say that I am a friend of his," retorted Martin, with just the least show of pride. "I just left him a few minutes before dinner time. Shake hands with him, gentlemen. You never met a whiter feller than Young Wild West."

Dolliver shook hands with our hero in rather a disinterested way, and then Webster and Quirk gave him their hands.

There was something rather strange about their quick actions when they shook hands, which Martin could not help noticing.

It struck him that they had lost their free and easy way since the young Prince of the Saddle had entered the room.

"They are afraid of him, as sure as guns," he muttered under his breath. "Well, I don't blame 'em for bein' uneasy, for if he once gits after 'em, it will soon be all up with 'em."

"And these gentlemen," went on Peterson, finishing the introduction, "are Young Wild West's partners and friends, Cheyenne Charlie, Jim Dart, Jack Robedee and Mr. Lively Rick from Devil Creek. They are all made of the best stuff that can be found in these parts, so don't be backward in making friends with them."

There was a general hand-shake all around again, and then Martin arose and introduced Webster and Quirk.

"Don't let us interrupt your game," said Peterson, who was quite a talkative fellow. "I accidentally got acquainted with Young Wild West about an hour ago, and I am now enjoying the honor of showing them around town."

This was indeed the case.

Peterson had dropped into the bar of the hotel where our friends were stopping, and having dropped a remark about the hold-up of the night before, had been requested by Jim Dart to tell all that took place.

Young Wild West took Peterson to be just what he was—

a miner with plenty of push and grit in him, and he formed a liking for him right away.

Thus it came to their going out with him to take in the town.

It was a rainy day, but they purchased umbrellas and went around that way.

Johnny's Joint was the second place they had stopped at since leaving the hotel, and it was here that Wild had an idea of meeting Tim Talbot, if he was yet in town.

And it did not take the champion young dead-shot very long to come to the conclusion that if the Terror of Taper Top was not in the gambling room, there were villains of his calibre there, anyway.

He became convinced from the moment he set eyes on the two men at the table with Mel Martin and Dolliver that they were not what they appeared to be.

They were disguised.

His quick eyes could see that.

And that being the case, they must be either officers of the law in search of a criminal, or criminals themselves.

Wild thought it was the latter, so he determined to watch the men closely.

He had little or nothing to say as the game proceeded, and he soon became of the opinion that Dolliver knew more about the cards than the other three players were giving him credit for.

When he had watched them ten minutes an altercation suddenly began between the four gamblers.

The stout old man had caught Webster taking a card from from his sleeve.

They were getting in it hot and heavy, one accusing and the other denying, when Webster suddenly turned to Wild and said:

"We will leave it to an outsider. Young Wild West, what do you think of this game? You have been looking on for some time now, and ought to have an idea of what is going on. Have you seen any one cheating?"

"Yes," was the quick reply. "I have seen all four of you doing considerable in that line. Gentlemen, if I were you, I would give up the game. It seems to be a sort of 'diamond cut diamond.'"

"You wasn't asked to say anything like that," said Dolliver, as he arose to his feet, his face flushing angrily.

"Oh, yes, I was," retorted Wild, with a smile. "I answered the very question I was asked, and then I gave a little advice in the way of a suggestion. All four of you are a set of card sharps; but, I must say, you are rather poor ones at that."

Strange as it may seem, the only one to show signs of anger at this was Dolliver; but he was a harmless old fellow, and there was no danger of there being any shots exchanged.

"Mebbe you think you know how to play ther game?" he asked, hotly.

"I do; but I seldom play it."

"Suppose you take a hand with us—you are so smart?"

"Well, just to accommodate you, I will."

Jim Dart was not a bit surprised when he heard his chum say this.

Like Wild, he had his suspicions about the two bearded men, and he knew that the Prince of the Saddle was going to take a hand in the game for a purpose.

The four promptly made room for him around the table and Wild moved his chair up.

The men were not playing with chips, but using the money itself.

"I like a five or six-handed game better, anyway," remarked Webster. "Won't one of the other gentlemen come in the game?"

"That's so!" exclaimed Martin and Quirk in a breath.

"I'm satisfied," said Dolliver, with an ugly grunt.

Wild looked at Charlie.

That look meant that he could take a hand if he desired.

Our hero had very little money, and did not intend to play long.

What he wanted to do was to get into an argument with the man called Webster.

He was the one he had picked out as being the clever villain in the game.

"I'll take a hand, if there ain't any objections," said Cheyenne Charlie.

No one had, so room was made for him.

Charlie got in between Quirk and Webster.

That made Webster sit almost opposite to Wild.

They cut for deal, after first agreeing on the ante, and it fell to the lot of Charlie to deal the cards.

Though he did not follow up the game, on the advice of Young Wild West, the scout was a good hand at the business.

And what Wild did not know about the cards was hardly worth knowing, though he never gambled for the purpose of winning another person's money.

He only did it when he had an object in view.

When the cards were dealt around, Dolliver bet ten dollars.

Wild raised it a like amount, and then Webster went him ten better, Martin meeting it.

Charlie and Quirk stayed out.

There was no heavy betting, each evidently having a rather slim hand after they drew their cards.

Dolliver raked in the pot, giving a satisfied grunt as he did so.

It continued in about this way until Webster got the deal.

Webster had laid down a "blind" of ten dollars, and when the cards were dealt everybody met it.

The game was now getting decidedly interesting.

Several patrons of the place had entered meanwhile and when it became noised about that Young Wild West, the boss of Weston, was playing in a game of draw poker, the interest became great.

Men were standing around the table three and four deep.

Young Wild West was as cool as though he was simply playing a game of dominoes with his friends.

Webster held the pack in his hands and dealt out what the players called for.

"How many?" he asked Wild, when it came to him.

"Five," was the reply, and he threw his hand in with the discards.

The dealer looked just a bit uneasy as he handed over the cards.

Quirk drew three and Charlie one.

Then Webster looked at his own hand, and discarding three, took that number from the pack.

Dolliver had failed to better his hand, so he simply bet the regular ante.

Wild met the bet, as did Quirk and Cheyenne Charlie.

Then what happened no one expected to see.

Webster met the bet and made the call.

It had been a very tame affair, after all.

It so happened that Charlie held the best hand, and he raked in the pot.

"I would like to ask you something?" spoke up Webster, looking hard at Wild. "What did you draw five cards for?"

"To keep you from getting four aces," was the calm reply. "I laid down three kings and a pair of queens in order to draw the whole five."

"That means that I was cheating?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I wasn't."

"What did you question me as to why I drew five cards for, then?"

"Just because I felt like doing so."

"And I answered you just because I felt like doing so."

"You did, eh?"

"Yes. Now, I will tell you why you asked the question. You were so surprised at my discarding the three kings and the pair of queens that you could not keep from asking me. You knew just the hand you dealt me, and if I had stood pat, you would have drawn three aces, which, with the one you have in that hand, would have given you four."

"You lie, if you say I knew what you had in your hand!"

Wild's eyes twinkled dangerously, but he remained cool.

"Don't say anything you will be sorry for, my friend," he retorted. "I will bet you that you have an ace in the hand you just laid down, and that if I had stood pat, you would have got the three that got divided between my friend and your friend."

"And I'll bet that you are a lying young hound!"

He drew a revolver as he made this bold remark.

Then something happened that almost took the breath from the lookers-on.

Young Wild West knocked the weapon from the man's hand, and then, as quick as a flash, seized the beard and tore it from the man's face.

"Aha! I am glad to meet you, Tim Talbot!" cried Young Wild West, covering the man with the muzzle of his revolver. "You could not hold your temper, and that has made you lose the game. Hands up, please, or you will die right in that chair!"

The friend of the villain was in the act of drawing his

shooter when he suddenly found the muzzle of Charlie's right under his nose.

"It ain't no use in raisin' a rumpus, stranger," the scout remarked. "You had better take it easy."

"Furies!" cried Talbot, when he found that his identity had been disclosed. "You will never take me, Young Wild West!"

As the words left his lips he threw up both feet and kicked the table over.

Our hero had not expected this movement, and he was forced over backward with the overturned table on top of him.

The Terror of Taper Top blew a shrill whistle and then everything was in an uproar.

Several shots were fired, but the villain seemed to bear a charmed life, and in a twinkling he had worked his way out of the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

WILD AND THE SHERIFF.

When Young Wild West got upon his feet there was a free fight in progress.

That was sufficient to prove that there were several of Tim Talbot's friends in the room.

The shots that had been fired had done little damage, since they had been aimed in the air more for the purpose of creating a confusion and allowing the outlaw leader to escape.

"Stop your wrangling, and get away from that door!" cried our hero, a revolver showing in either hand. "If you are not mighty careful, I will begin to shoot directly, and when I shoot some one always gets hurt. Stand aside, now! I am going after the Terror of Taper Top!"

As if by magic, the crowd drew back and allowed the dashing young dead-shot to pass.

The overturning of the table had interfered with Cheyenne Charlie, too; but not enough to cause him to lose sight of the man he had covered.

He still kept him right where he wanted him, and Jim and the rest were keeping an eye on the men in the room to see that they did not interfere.

As Wild reached the door he met half a dozen men pushing their way in.

"I'm ther sheriff!" cried their leader, a tall, raw-boned fellow. "Ther fust man what interferes with me in ther course of my duty will either be arrested or die with his boots on!"

"Are you looking for Tim Talbot?" asked Young Wild West.

"That's jest ther crooked coyote we're lookin' for," was the answer. "I got wind a little while ago that he was in town, an' that bein' ther case, I knowed he must be here, as everything drops into Johnny's Joint, from a million-aire pork-raiser to a Snake Injun with ther leprosy! Clear ther track! I'm Strawberry Bill, ther sheriff of Pennington

County, an' when I talk I always mean somethin'! An' when I shoot I shoot to kill!"

"Tim Talbot went out of this door less than a minute before you came in," said Wild, sizing up the man and coming to the quick conclusion that he was a man who would go through fire and water for the man he wanted.

"If that is so, sonny, he didn't go out on ther street."

"Then he is in the building yet," retorted Wild, not noticing the appellation of "sonny" just then.

"Here's one of his pards," spoke up Charlie.

"Good enough! One of my deputies will 'tend to him. Zeke, jest nail onto him, will yer?"

"Like a lizard clingin' to a stone wall I will!" replied the deputy, showing a pair of handcuffs. "Hold out yer hands, you varmint!"

There was nothing for the villain to do but to obey, and as the steel bracelets clicked on his wrists, Cheyenne Charlie grabbed the false beard and tore it from his face, disclosing the features of Len, the lieutenant of the outlaw band.

"Ah!" exclaimed the sheriff, "I know you, old feller. So you are traveling around in disguise nowadays, are you? Jumping Jehosaphat! But this is a haul, ain't it! Now for ther main guy in ther case."

"Perhaps the proprietor of the place could give some information concerning him," suggested our hero.

"That's right. Where's Johnny? Come here, Johnny Jumper! We all know that you're crooked, an' that you run a crooked joint. Trot out here, now, or ther minions of ther law will have yer in their clutches afore you kin say Jack Robinson."

"Who says I may know something about Tim Talbot?" demanded a short little fellow with a badly scarred face and a big diamond in his shirt front, as he pushed his way in front of Wild.

"I said you might know something about where he is," was the quick retort, for Wild knew only too well that the man was addressing him personally.

"Then I say you are badly mistaken, you brat of an up-start boy!" and the irate proprietor struck a savage blow right at our hero's face.

But the blow was nimbly dodged, and the next instant Young Wild West had the diminutive Johnny Jumper in a vise-like grip.

Before any one knew what he was up to, he lifted him bodily and flung him half-way across the room.

Johnny struck the floor with a bang and bounded to his feet as though he was made of rubber.

Then he drew a revolver, and was in the act of firing a shot at Wild when Lively Rick knocked the weapon from his hand.

"Whoopee!" yelled the man from Devil Creek, acting as though he had just awakened to what was going on, and then picking him up, he tossed him over to Charlie, who caught him as though he was a bag or rags and bumped him upon the floor, head down.

The sudden appearance of the little proprietor had caused our friends to look on the humorous side of the affair, and

they were now in for fun, forgetful of the fact that Tim Talbot might even then be making his escape.

We say our friends, but we must omit one from those who was looking for the fun that could be got out of the thing.

That was Wild.

Just now he was about as anxious as the sheriff to catch the Terror of Taper Top.

He pushed his way into the hall and found the outside door guarded by a man with a big navy revolver.

"I'm a deputy," he said. "You can't pass out of here till the sheriff says so."

That was enough to convince our hero that, unless he had made his exit by some other door, Tim Talbot was still in the house.

"All right," he replied, and back he went into the gambling room, from which he could hear roars of laughter coming.

The proprietor of Johnny's Joint was in a great rage.

He had managed to get into a corner of the room behind a table, and he was trying in vain to make himself heard, his face almost bursting from his violent anger.

Some of the men started into singing and dancing and throwing the tables and chairs over.

The sheriff was looking around as though he did not know whether to laugh or get mad.

Finally he found his tongue, and bawled out above the din:

"Stop your humbug, won't yer? I'm after Tim Talbot, an' I want him real bad! Shet up your tomfoolery, now, an' let me 'tend to my business!"

Then he pushed his way over to where the little proprietor was wildly dancing behind the table.

"Johnny," said he, thrusting the long barrel of his shooter right under the man's nose, "stop that, an' let's talk business. Stop it, or my finger might press ther trigger of my gun by mistake."

This had a wonderful effect on Johnny.

He calmed down as if by magic.

The crowd ceased their noisy clamor, too, and the sheriff was able to make himself heard quite easily.

"Johnny, where's ther sneakin' coyote called Tim Talbot?" he demanded, sternly.

"I don't know, Bill," was the reply.

"Yer don't know?"

"No."

"Well, he's somewhere in this shanty, an' I'm goin' to find him. If you say he ain't here, an' he is here, I'm goin' to take you to ther lock-up as an accomplice of his'n. Do you hear what I say?"

"I don't know where he is," was the reply.

"Don't you know him when you see him?"

"No."

"Johnny Jumper, I bet you're tellin' me a lie, an' if I find that yer have, look out for me!"

"I am tellin' you no lie. I ain't s'posed to know everybody what comes in my place, am I?"

"Well, no; but this is ther headquarters of Tim Talbot

when he's in Deadwood. I found that out in ther investigations I've been makin' ther past week. Now, then, I want you to take us all through your blamed old joint. Do you understand what I say?"

"Of course I do. Why didn't you talk that way when you came in. If Talbot was here, he's had lots of chances to git away while all this has been going on. But no! You had to listen to that boy with ther long hair, who thinks he's so smart. That feller will wish he never come in here before I git through with him. I wouldn't be surprised if he belongs to ther band of Talbot, an' they jest put up this job to hurt my place."

"Young Wild West ain't of ther sort to belong to a gang of thieves, my little sawed-off an' hammered-down stump!" spoke up Jack Robedee. "It are a good deal more likely that you belong to ther gang what hangs out around Taper Top. I'll bet you ten dollars you do, anyhow."

"I'll take that bet!" snapped the little man, and he promptly pulled out the money.

Jack was not going to back out now.

He was quite sure he had hit the nail on the head, and it struck him that he would have a chance to prove his assertion before very long.

Then a thorough search of the premises was made with the result that the Terror of Taper Top was not there.

"Never mind," observed Young Wild West, when they came back and stood in the bar of the place. "I will take it upon myself to find Tim Talbot, and if I don't produce him, alive or dead, inside of thirty-six hours, my name is not Young Wild West."

"You talk putty loud for a boy, sonny," remarked Strawberry Bill, the sheriff, with a sneer. "As if you could find ther foxy coyote and quicker than I could."

"See here," cried our hero, walking up to the man. "You call me sonny, and I don't like that. If I was a big lout of a boy with a thick head, like you must have been once, I wouldn't mind it. But as I am about as much of a man as any one in this house about now, I don't want to be called sonny."

"You don't, hey? Well, what are you goin' to do about it if I call it to yer ag'in, sonny?"

"This is what I will do!" and catching the man about the waist with a lightning-like move, Wild threw him over the bar.

The sheriff landed among a lot of bottles with a crash that blended like a musical accompaniment with the cry of surprise and admiration that went up from the crowd.

The man behind the bar reached for his revolver, as though to take a shot at Wild, but Cheyenne Charlie made a grab for him, and catching him by the collar, yanked him over the bar.

"I reckon ther sheriff is in charge of ther place now," the scout said with a grin. "You jest keep still, an' we'll pay for ther damage what's done."

This just suited those present.

It was fun for them to see the sheriff handled in that way, and the bartender being a rather tough person, they

delighted in seeing him get hauled from behind his breast-works, where he had a way of lording it over them as he saw fit.

Strawberry Bill extricated himself from the wreck of the broken and overturned bottles and got upon his feet with no little difficulty, since he had been wedged in between two casks.

"Roarin' catamounts! Who fired me over here like that, anyhow?"

"I did. Come around here and I will do it again, if you want to see how it was done," calmly retorted Young Wild West.

"All right, sonny. I'm your huckleberry! I wouldn't think of pourin' lead into you for doin' that, 'cause it are about ther greatest thing I ever had did to me. I'm goin' to buckle into you now, though, an' if your wishbone don't crack afore I git through with you, I'll eat a buffler bull, hair, hide an' all."

"And if you don't call me mister after I get through with you, I will eat you after you have eaten the bull!" remarked Wild, who was now just in the humor to give the sheriff all that belonged to him, and a trifle more.

Around the bar Strawberry Bill rushed like a cyclone, the men getting back out of the way to give him plenty of room.

The young miner, Peterson, felt much alarmed for the safety of the dashing young fellow he had learned to think so much of during his short acquaintance with him.

He made up his mind right then and there if the sheriff hurt him, he would hurt the sheriff.

"Clear ther track!" roared Strawberry Bill, and then he made a dive for Wild.

But his grasping fingers clutched nothing but the empty air; he had missed the boy by fully two feet.

And before he could recover himself, he felt a pair of sinewy arms catch him about the waist.

Then up he went and over the bar as neatly and as quickly as he had gone before.

Jingle—crash!

The bottles got it again, and the floor shook as he came down.

"I reckon I've got enough, mister!" said the sheriff, as he got up and came out, wiping the blood from his hand where he had been cut by a broken bottle. "You are a wonder, you are, an' I ain't mad a bit. Shake!"

Wild shook hands with him, and then the crowd broke into a cheer.

Our friends then paid for the damage done and left the place, Wild taking care to promise the sheriff that he would find Tim Talbot and bring him to him inside of thirty-six hours.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT HAPPENED NEAR THE BIG TREE.

Peterson went back to the hotel with Wild and his friends.

"I am awful glad I met you people this afternoon," he

said. "I don't know when I have seen such a lively time and been interested in so much at the same time. I want you to come to my house to dinner to-morrow. I have just started in to keeping house, but I guess you will find enough to eat when you come. Mr. West, I want you to see my wife and tell her personally that you are going to hunt down the polite villain who robbed us. Will you promise to come?"

"Well, yes; I am sure I have no objections, if the rest haven't," answered our hero. "How about it, boys?"

"Let us go, by all means," said Jim.

The rest expressed their willingness, so it was settled that they should be guests of the newly married couple the next afternoon.

"It might be that I will be able to tell your wife that we have caught Tim Talbot and turned him over to the sheriff," remarked Wild, as Peterson was taking leave of them.

"That would be wonderful if you could do that, as it seems to be an impossibility to catch the wily scoundrel."

"It seems strange to me that he has not been caught before. The way he runs about the town in disguise shows that the sheriff does not have his eyes open much. Why, if we wanted to do it, we could have shot the Terror several times and then claimed the reward upon the delivery of his body. I don't intend to shoot him, if I can help it. I want to bring him in alive. I am going to start on the hunt for him to-night."

"You are?"

"Yes."

"Well, I wish you luck, but don't go to running into danger."

"There would be no fun in it if there was no danger attached to it."

"I suppose that is true. You are used to a life of action."

"Yes; and plenty of action," spoke up Jim.

"We are used to it, so we can't get along without it," added Charlie.

"An' ther fun of it is that we find plenty of action sometimes when we ain't lookin' for it," said Jack.

"But we generally come out alive, for all that," put in Lively Rick, who thought he must say something, too.

"Well, it seems that you always have, so far, anyway," and Peterson went off laughing.

Wild went to the landlord of the hotel and asked if they could have their supper right away.

"Certainly," was the reply. "You kin have it jest as soon as the cook kin get it ready for you."

"All right. Half an hour will do, I suppose."

"I'll have it ready for you afore that time," the man averred.

"And our horses can be fed and watered right away, too?"

"Sure thing."

"All right. We are going to take a ride, and don't know how soon we will be back to-night. But you keep open all night, so I don't suppose it will make any great difference to you."

"No difference at all. I hire men to work nights, and

they might as well earn their money. You kin come back at ten o'clock, or you kin fetch up here at five in ther mornin'. It will be all ther same, as far as my accommodations for man an' beast are concerned."

Wild had got it in his head that he must catch the Terror of Taper Top, just to let the citizens of Deadwood know what he was made of.

Another thing, he wanted to show the sheriff how to run the office he had been elected to fill.

It was five o'clock when the five sat down to supper.

It had stopped raining by this time, but the sky was still cloudy and overcast.

Our hero had it in his head that Tim Talbot would wait till darkness set in before he started for his retreat.

He was pretty certain that he had not left Deadwood, and that he was hidden somewhere in Johnny's Joint while the search was going on for him.

There could have easily have been a secret room or two in the house.

Wild had experienced quite considerable of secret rooms while in Cheyenne a few weeks before.

It was still very cloudy when the five mounted their horses and started out to hunt up the Terror, though they felt pretty sure that the rain was over.

"We will ride out in the direction of Taper Top," said Wild. "When we get to the tree with the placard on it we will hide behind the fringe of high bushes there and wait for some one to come along. It is quite probable that Talbot will be disguised if he does come along, so we will have to keep a sharp watch."

"I seen a sign out jest before we come in this afternoon with a reward of two thousand on it," remarked Jack.

"Yes; that is what the sheriff said. But the mere offer of a reward won't catch the scoundrel, unless it is a large one. He has too many friends in this place for that."

"That's jest what makes him so bold an' darin'," Cheyenne Charlie said.

"That Johnny Jumper is one of his friends, jest as sure as you live," remarked Rick. "Nothin' could make me think any different from that. Ain't he a little feller? I don't believe he is five feet tall, an' yet he acts as though he were over six, an' more than that. My! But when you picked him up and throwed him across the room I thought I'd have a fit from laughin', Wild."

"He is like the majority of little men—very hot-tempered and impulsive. I believe he would have shot me if you hadn't stopped him, Rick."

"Oh, I was watchin' him. I've learned how to watch such coyotes as he is since I've been travelin' with you. You have learned me a whole lot, an' that's why I never git caught nappin' any more."

The five rode on till they came to the big tree that was at the point where the trail started for Weston and the other towns south of Deadwood.

It was beginning to get dark now, but not too dark for them to notice that another placard had been put up over the first one they had seen.

The sheriff had sent a man there that afternoon to put it up, and he had taken the piece of paper Tim Talbot had scribbled upon from the first one.

Our friends rode around, and were soon halted in the very place the villains had laid in wait for the stagecoach the night before.

Of course they were not really aware that they were on the same spot, but they could easily judge that it was suitable for just such work.

"We must wait here awhile, so we may just as well dismount," observed our hero, setting the example.

The horses were allowed to graze, while their owners stood about talking in low tones.

Half an hour passed.

They were beginning to think that no one was coming along at all.

The stagecoach from Baldtown was due at eight o'clock, or thereabouts, but that was some little time off yet.

Ten minutes more flitted by and they suddenly heard the sounds of approaching hoofs.

Owing to the sky being cloudy, it was now as dark as a pocket, and if they wanted to catch a glimpse of whoever it might be coming they must get out on the road.

"Mount and ride out!" exclaimed Wild. "Be ready with your shooters, too, for there is no telling what will happen. If it is Tim Talbot I want to try to take him alive, if I possibly can."

Wild led the way out upon the highway just as two horsemen showed up in the darkness.

Though they said not a word to them, the two riders reined in their steeds at once.

"Hello!" said a voice, which was unmistakably that of the Terror of Taper Top.

The heart of Young Wild West gave a bound.

He felt that he was going to make good what he had said in much shorter time than he had thought.

"Hello!" our hero answered, disguising his voice.

"How many are there of you?" went on the captain, thinking surely the horsemen were members of his band, as he had told them to meet him somewhere on the road after darkness had set in.

"Five."

"Where are the rest?"

"They didn't come."

Wild was now close enough to the two men to see that one of them had a bandage over his eye.

"Ah!" he thought; "that is the Mexican who was going to hit me on the head with a hammer. Well, he must go back to Deadwood with us, too."

Just then the clatter of horses' hoofs came to their ears.

Horsemen were approaching from the direction of Taper Top.

Young Wild West thought it high time to act.

"Tim Talbot," said he, in his natural voice, "hold up your hands. You are my prisoner!"

At the same instant he reached over and seized the man by the collar and thrust his revolver under his nose.

Charlie and Jack had worked around on either side of the other fellow, and they grasped his arms the moment Wild spoke.

The Terror of Taper Top was one of the quickest men to think and act that Young Wild West had ever met, and though he was expecting something of the kind from him, our hero was not prepared for what he did do.

Instead of throwing up his hands, the villain deliberately dropped down and rolled from his horse.

At the same instant he sounded a whistle that his men were familiar with, and which told them that there was danger.

Though taken by surprise, Wild recovered himself instantly.

He could have shot the Terror as he rolled over and over toward the side of the road, but he did not do so.

He had it in his head that he wanted to take him alive, and he was going to try his best to do so.

But rather than see him get away he would shoot.

The galloping horsemen were now within fifty yards of our friends, and they realized that they would have to do something at once.

"Get over under the tree—quick!" exclaimed the young Prince of the Saddle.

His companions obeyed him with remarkable quickness, taking the captured Mexican and his horse with them.

Just as they had placed the big tree between the road and themselves, the band of desperadoes Talbot had expected to meet came to a halt.

"Fire on them!" cried the Terror, who was now in the bushes at the roadside. "Fire on them! They are behind the big tree!"

"Don't a fire!" the captured Mexican screamed. "They have a got me!"

The men did not obey the captain's command.

They evidently did not want to shoot one of their colleagues.

"Fire! I say!" cried Talbot. "Don't mind what Valdez says. It is Young Wild West and his gang who are after us. If the Mexican gets shot we can spare him. It is your business to put Young Wild West out of the way as soon as possible. He has sworn to hand me over to the sheriff!"

"That is right!" called out our hero. "We are going to take the Terror of Taper Top to the sheriff! If you men fire at us you will be apt to kill one of your number, and we will be liable to drop some of you at the same time. I have my rifle leveled now, and if I can't drop two or three of you in as many seconds, I don't know what I am talking about. The question now is: are you going to let us take Tim Talbot a prisoner, or are you going to fight it out?"

"Fight it out!" almost screamed Talbot from his hiding place in the bushes.

The wretch was afraid to crawl over to where his men had halted, for fear he would get a bullet from one of the five.

"All right, then! You fire the first shot."

As if he had not thought of this before, the captain of the outlaws did fire.

His bullet hit the tree.

Lively Rick answered the shot, firing at the flash.

But he missed, for there was a derisive laugh, showing that Talbot had found a good position.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" the Mexican kept crying. "You a kill me if you do!"

And the men did not shoot, causing their leader to fly into more of a rage than ever.

"You a let me go," said the Mexican in a whisper to Wild. "I kill Captain Tim. He knock a my eye last night; now he a want me a shot. Let me a go an' I a kill him!"

This was said in a tone that was full of vindictiveness and hate, and it is quite likely that the villain meant what he said.

But Wild was not going to let him go just then.

He had found that it was a good deal safer to keep him right where he was.

As bad as the Terror's followers were, they did not want to run the risk of shooting one of their own men.

Our friends were in a position where they could see without being seen.

The instant the villains fired at them they could fire a volley that would certainly lessen their number by half.

And then it would be quite an easy thing to pick off one or two of the others before they could get to cover.

Lively Rick now sent another bullet where he thought Talbot might be.

Wild did not attempt to stop him, knowing that it was hardly probable that he would hit him, and thinking it would be apt to hurry matters along a little.

Again a derisive laugh rang out, and then once more Talbot called upon his men to fire at our friends.

This time they obeyed, or rather they fired above the heads of our friends and their captive.

But it was a very bad move for some of them.

Cr-r-a-a-ack!

Five rifles belched forth streams of fire, the report sounding as though it came from a cannon.

Five of the outlaws went down, the riderless horses jumping about in wild confusion.

The rest turned to go back the way they had come, but once more those five rifles sounded and down went two more.

As the second volley was fired, the Mexican, who had not been bound, slid from the back of his horse, and before Jack could catch him, he started across the road.

Robedee grabbed his revolver, but Wild restrained him. "Wait!" he whispered; "he is not trying to escape. He is after his captain."

This was indeed the case.

The Mexican plunged right into the bushes where he had heard the voice of Talbot.

He did not utter a word.

Talbot heard the crashing in the bushes, and thinking he

was going to be captured, he got up and ran with the speed of the deer.

As Lively Rick caught sight of his form flitting through the darkness he was going to fire.

Young Wild West stopped him.

"The Mexican is after him," he said. "Let him catch him. It may save us a whole lot of trouble. We will simply follow them and be there at the finish."

"And you won't get him alive, after all, it is not likely," spoke up Jim.

"You can't tell about that," was the rejoinder. "Just take it a little easy and wait."

As the five rode cut from beneath the tree and rode in the direction the outlaws had taken, the moon suddenly popped into view from behind a cloud.

The weather had cleared at last, and it seemed that Luna had shown her face just for the purpose of lighting the way for those interested in the exciting drama that was being enacted.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

Tim Talbot ran with the speed of a deer, and after him came the revengeful Mexican.

But Valdez was not as fleet of foot as his captain, and when he saw that he was losing ground he drew his revolver and fired a shot.

Then Talbot wheeled and fired two at him.

Neither of the bullets took effect, however, and the race was kept up.

Again and again the Mexican fired.

As he did not slacken his speed he could not aim straight, and the result was that he simply wasted the shots.

Valdez only had one revolver, but the captain had a brace of them.

The Mexican knew this, but he did not profit by the knowledge.

He kept on firing, and at the last shot he hit Talbot's right arm.

The fleeing villain dropped the weapon he held in that hand and drew the other with his left.

He would have turned before this and fought it out with the Mexican had he not seen the five horsemen riding along at a gait just sufficient to keep up with them.

He knew if he dropped the Mexican he would only be shot, or fall into the hands of Young Wild West.

The few survivors of his once invincible band were riding as fast as they could for the retreat at the foot of Taper Top.

Tim Talbot never realized until that moment how frail and weak he was, after all.

When he had plenty of friends around he felt equal to fighting a whole regiment, but when he was alone it was entirely different.

At that very moment he felt that he was no longer the Terror of Taper Top.

But he meant to reach his snug retreat if possible, though it was really a forlorn hope without a horse.

Loud and deep were the maledictions the villain uttered as he turned to shoot at his avenging pursuer.

Up went his remaining revolver, and its spiteful crack sounded.

But a mocking laugh was all the result he obtained.

At that instant the Mexican came upon the revolver he had caused the captain to drop.

With a jubilant cry, he paused long enough to pick it up.

Talbot had only fired three times at him, and that meant that there were three chambers loaded.

The cruel Mexican felt that those three loaded chambers might be the means of satisfying his revenge, after all.

With a spurt he bounded after his man, gaining a few feet at the start.

Then he fired again.

The bullet must have whizzed past the head of Talbot dangerously close, for he ducked, and then turned to fire another shot.

Crack!

The shot was aimed pretty straight this time, for it grazed the bandage the pursuer had around his head and caused it to loosen and come off.

But it did not check his speed a particle.

The man had been transformed into a demon from the fact that his captain had ordered him to be fired upon by his companions.

He no longer was a coward.

He fired again, this time striking the heel of Talbot's boot and causing him to stagger.

Valdez thought he had surely wounded him, but when he struck out with renewed speed he found out differently.

"Stop and fight it out, Tim Talbot!" he shouted.

The captain did stop much sooner than his pursuer expected.

He dropped to the ground in time to escape the bullet that was sent after him, and then taking deliberate aim, he fired.

The Mexican threw up his arms and fell!

Talbot's bullet had found its billet.

Our friends reined in their steeds just as a riderless horse went dashing past them.

It was a coal-black animal, and was none other than the one Talbot always rode.

The scoundrel saw the horse at about the same time Wild and the others did.

Straight toward him the horse ran.

"Don't fire at him!" cried our hero. "I am bound to take him alive now, anyway. Let him mount the horse, and then I will show him how quickly Spitfire can catch him."

In spite of the fact that his right arm was wounded, Talbot mounted the horse with amazing quickness as it came to a stop at a word of command from him.

Then he rode up the road toward Taper Top with the speed of the wind.

"Now, Spitfire, do your best!" exclaimed Young Wild West.

The noble sorrel leaped forward like a shot from a gun.

Spitfire knew just what was expected of him, it seemed, and he began rapidly to gain on the black.

Wild was now certain of catching the scoundrel.

If such a thing was that he could not overtake him he would drop him with a shot from his rifle.

Wild's four friends thundered after him.

They could not keep up with the sorrel stallion, but they wanted to be as close as possible when the finish came.

Tim Talbot had just about covered a mile when he found that Young Wild West was within a few feet of him.

He had dropped his revolver in getting upon the horse's back in such a hurry, and he now had nothing to defend himself with but his hunting knife.

But the villain drew this, plucky to the last.

"You will never take me, Young Wild West!" he called out defiantly.

"Oh, yes, I will," was the calm rejoinder. "You may as well give up, for you have played your last card and lost!"

At that instant Wild caused the sorrel to make an extra spurt, and he was at the villain's side in an instant.

With the butt of his revolver he struck the knife from the man's hand, and then seized the bridle rein of the black.

"Whoa!" he cried.

The horse slackened pace, but did not stop.

Spitfire came right down to a trot, though, and Wild had to either let go the bridle rein or be dragged from the saddle.

He let go.

"All right!" he exclaimed. "You can go a little farther, Tim Talbot. I'll see how this will fix you."

He quickly seized the coiled lariat that was hanging to the pommel of his saddle, and pointing Spitfire off to the right, he began swinging it in the air.

The next minute it shot from his hand.

The lasso made many curves, which could be seen in the bright moonlight, and then settled about both the rider and the neck of the horse.

Then the sorrel braced himself; there was a quick tug and over went the black on top of the Terror of Taper Top.

"That was as neat as I ever seen done," said Cheyenne Charlie from behind. "You nailed him ther first shot, Wild."

"Yes; I fetched him!" was the reply. "And I caught him alive, too."

Before either the horse or the rider could get upon their feet Wild had dismounted and was on the spot.

He caught the horse by the head and helped the animal up.

Talbot remained sitting upon the ground.

"Get up and get into the saddle!" his young captor commanded.

"No; I won't," was the answer. "You can shoot me, but I won't do it. You are not going to take me to the sheriff alive!"

"I am!"

"You won't!"

"We will see about that. Come here, boys, and put him

on the horse. And when you get him there, tie him so he can't fall off."

"We'll do that all right," Jack Robedee answered.

And they did do it in less than five minutes.

Tim Talbot fought fiercely, but there was no use in his doing it; the result was the same.

"Now, I guess we will go back to Deadwood and see Strawberry Bill, the sheriff, eat that buffalo bull," said Wild, smiling as he thought of the surprise the sheriff would show when he saw them come in with the prisoner.

"And claim the two thousand dollars reward, too," added Jim.

"Certainly. We will divide it among the five of us. It belongs to us, and we may as well have it."

"It don't belong to us; it belongs to you," corrected Charlie. "You was ther one what caught ther Terror of Taper Top."

"Yes; but you fellows were with me when I caught him. You know my rules well enough to make no further objections to what I say."

That settled it.

They did know his rules.

He always made it a point to divide equally with those who were with him when they struck a rich find.

And Tim Talbot, the Terror of Taper Top, was certainly a rich find.

Wild felt quite sure that the survivors of the band would not attempt to rescue their captain, even if they were within hearing distance.

"We will take him into Deadwood right away," he said. "When we notify the sheriff that we have got him we can tell him to attend to the burial of the fellows who went under."

"That's it!" cried all hands, and away they went back to Deadwood at an easy canter.

It was only a little past eight o'clock when Young Wild West rode into town with his prisoner.

One of the first men our friends met was Peterson.

He had his tenderfoot friend with him, and when they saw the rather handsome face of the helpless captain in the light of an oil lamp they gave a cheer.

They recognized the face only too well.

But how different was the expression on it from the time they saw it when he robbed them!

The smiling, sarcastic look was gone—gone forever, too!

Tim Talbot's days were numbered—aye, his hours!

"Three cheers for Young Wild West!" shouted Peterson.

"He has kept his promise, and has brought the Terror of Taper Top in alive!"

Then others took up the cry and soon there was a big procession on the way to the jail.

On arriving there, some one ran ahead and notified the sheriff, who was eating a late supper.

Strawberry Bill would not believe what he heard, but he came out, just the same.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he exclaimed, when he saw the

prisoner and the smiling faces of Young Wild West and his friends.

"And you will eat ther buffalo bull now, I suppose," observed Wild.

"Great snakes! How did you do it?"

"It was easy enough. You people don't know how to go at it to catch highwaymen here in Deadwood. You place too much confidence in the saloon-keepers and the hangers-on of such places. A highwayman could not operate successfully without having friends in the town nearest to him. I made up my mind that Talbot was in Johnny's Joint all the time we were searching the place, and I took it that as soon as darkness came he would light out for his retreat at Taper Top. I was exactly right in my thinking, and here he is."

"So he is, sure enough! Well, when you bring the buefler around I'll try to eat it. But say! Did yer run afoul of any of ther rest of ther gang?"

"Yes; we struck the whole band."

"An' where are they now?"

"About seven of them are waiting for the undertaker down by the big tree, and the rest got away, because we let them."

"Do you mean that, Young Wild West?"

"Every word of it. I suppose you will attend to the burial of the dead villains?"

"Certainly. Come right in the office and git your reward."

Wild waited until he saw that Talbot was placed under lock and key, and then he went to the office.

The two thousand dollars was paid over to him, and then right in the presence of the crowd Wild divided it among his four companions.

Then a cheer went up and our friends had to force their way through the crowd in order to get back to the hotel.

The next day they went over to Peterson's and took dinner with him, as they had promised.

They found his bride to be a pleasant little lady, and when Wild invited them to come over to Weston and see the women folks over there, they promised that they would at no distant day.

There was no excitement during that day other than the talk of the capture of the famous Tim Talbot.

Johnny's Joint had closed the night before for some reason, and its proprietor was nowhere to be found in town.

That evening when they were on their way back from Peterson's, our friends met the sheriff and Mel Martin.

Martin shook hands warmly with Wild and said:

"I am never going to play cards again as long as I live, Young Wild West. I made up my mind to that yesterday when the rumpus took place in Johnny's Joint. I'm goin' to try and be something like you in ther future—honest in all things."

"I hope you stick to that," was our hero's reply. "I will make inquiries about you in a month from now, and find out whether you do or not."

"I hope you will."

Then the sheriff told them that he had been down to the scene of the fight, and that the slain outlaws were buried.

"We found ther way to git to Taper Top, too," he added. "An' just when we was within a couple of hundred yards of it a big explosion went off, an' ther whole thing tumbled down! It was a wonderful sight, I kin tell you."

"The surviving outlaws must have touched off a keg of powder when they saw you coming," Wild remarked.

"Yes; it must have been that way."

The next day Young Wild West and his four friends started for Weston.

Wild's trip to Deadwood had been very satisfactory, since he had purchased the property at a lower figure than he expected to pay for it, and had ridden the town of the Terror of Taper Top at the same time.

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST'S CLOSE CALL; OR, THE RAIDERS OF RAWHIDE RIDGE," which will be the next number (27) of "Wild West Weekly."

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